Introduction

> Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.
>
> —*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 376

Every Sunday in Episcopal churches across the world, people gather for Holy Eucharist. We all pray using *The Book of Common Prayer* so we hear and use many of the same scriptures over and over. One of the verses that we often hear week after week is, "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God."

This verse is used in the offertory sentence, which comes just as the people's offerings are collected, and is a way of pointing people toward the sacrament of Holy Eucharist that we are about to receive. We are encouraged to make connections between our Sunday prayers and our daily lives. We are encouraged to be generous in our offerings as God has been generous to us.

While there are nine choices for offertory sentences, the most popular choice—by far—is the one in whose honor this book is named. The words come from the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Paul's lovely letter about how

Christ's sacrificial life and love is meant to shape and form us all.

Why is this offertory sentence the most popular choice?

We can't say for sure, but maybe it's the first three words. Walk. In. Love. These words embody action, just as the Christian life is about action and movement. They emphasize love. The phrase paints a clear picture, a vision of how we ought to love and move. But maybe there's more. The rest of the sentence gets real. To love "as Christ loved us and gave himself for us" is to be all in. This kind of love goes way beyond nice. It is all-consuming. Christ-like love, like Jesus' very life, is "an offering and sacrifice to God."

Christ-like love is not about us; it is about God and our neighbors. It is impossibly generous. In fact, this type of love is only possible by God's grace. We'll never manage to love this way on our own. And this is where our liturgies come into play. To see bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ is to behold God's grace, to see radical transformation. Taking part in the sacraments helps us to see God's grace at work in the world around us. Seeing God's grace at work trains us to open our hearts and our eyes to God's action in the sacraments.

For Episcopalians—Anglican Christians—prayer, belief, and life itself are inextricably related. Right belief helps our prayer and our lives. Daily prayer shapes our belief and guides our lives. A sacrificial, loving life feeds our prayer time and transforms our faith from passive to active.

This book is about walking in love. For Christians, this journey begins at the baptismal font, is nourished by the riches of the church, and is lived out in the world beyond the walls of churches. You can see an artistic hint of this idea on the cover of the book. You see the inside of a church, but instead of a back wall, the church mystically opens up to a lovely path through a forest. Our churches invite us to follow Jesus into the world. And of course, our faith invites us to bring our world into the church.

Suggested Offertory Sentences

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and make good your vows to the Most High. *Psalm 50:14*

Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; bring offerings and come into his courts. *Psalm 96:8*

Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God. *Ephesians 5:2*

I appeal to you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. *Romans 12:1*

If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. *Matthew 5:23, 24*

Through Christ let us continually offer to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his Name. But do not neglect to do good

and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. *Hebrews 13:15, 16*

O Lord our God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power; because you have created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. *Revelation 4:11*

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. For everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom, and you are exalted as head over all. *1 Chronicles 29:11*

Let us with gladness present the offerings and oblations of our life and labor to the Lord.

These can be found in The Book of Common Prayer, *page 376.*

We hope you find in this book not only an overview of the beliefs and practices of the Episcopal Church but also a foundation for a life that is guided and nourished by the church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Christian Faith

Some readers of this book will be new to the Christian faith. Others will be veterans but may wonder about the authors and what they believe. If you want a more comprehensive view of the basics of the Christian faith, we also co-wrote *Faithful Questions: Exploring the Way with Jesus* (Forward Movement, 2015). But for now, we offer a very basic summary of the faith so that you can

see our perspective—or maybe get the lay of the land if you are new to the faith.

Of course, we accept the teaching of the ancient creeds of the church (see Chapter 13). Since we are both priests, we have also gladly promised to teach the doctrine of the church as it is set out in *The Book of Common Prayer.* And we take scripture very seriously, agreeing in our ordination vows that the Bible contains all things necessary to salvation. Perhaps it is helpful for us to share our faith as a story—not our story but the story of scripture.

In the beginning, before there was anything else, there was God's love. God brought forth everything, including this planet where we live, creating light and dark, land and sea, animals and plants, and finally making people. God gave us our freedom—the ability to choose right or wrong and whether to even follow God—and we squandered our gift. We chose to walk away from God, preferring selfishness and fear.

God sent prophets to remind us of God's way. From time to time, we listened to the prophets, and we remembered who we are and how we are meant to live. Each time, we eventually rejected the prophets and their message, always returning to selfishness and fear.

Finally, God's own son was sent into the world. Jesus Christ was born like any other human, tiny and vulnerable, in the middle of nowhere in a backwater region of the Roman Empire. The most important birth in history might seem to some to be insignificant and ordinary. We learn a lot about the God we worship when we see that God chose to enter our world not in power and might, but in vulnerability.

Jesus Christ was Perfect Love enfleshed. Jesus showed us who God is and how we are to love. Jesus' love is expansive: He especially loved the unlovable and people at the margins of society. Jesus' love is honest: He always told the truth. Jesus' love is invitational: He wanted to draw people into his way of life and love.

Then as now, the powers of the world feared and hated Perfect Love. This kind of love is a threat to empires and all powerful people. The love of Christ cares about people, but it cares nothing for power, for might, or for prestige. The authorities in Jesus' day tried to extinguish Perfect Love by killing Jesus. They put him on a cross to die.

Jesus died. But on the third day, as God had promised, Jesus was raised to new life. Jesus wasn't kind-of dead, kind-of raised to a sort-of new life. No, we believe that Jesus was stone-cold dead, and God the Father raised him completely to new life. We celebrate this new life at Easter, but we celebrate more than the power of something that seems impossible. We celebrate that in the raising of Jesus to new life, we see God's love is stronger than death, stronger than fear, and stronger than anything that can happen to us in this earthly life.

Jesus soon returned to dwell with his Father in heaven, but before he left, he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to abide with the church and lead people into all truth. Fifty days after that first Easter, when the disciples were gathered to celebrate their Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the church in all its diversity, from many nations and peoples. In that act, God showed us all that the church is for everyone of every culture.

The New Testament presents several letters and documents from the time of the early church. In these letters, Saint Paul and others write to fledgling Christian communities that are trying to figure out what it means to follow Jesus. This is where we are in the story. Like those early Christians, we are trying to figure out how to follow Jesus in our own imperfect way. Fortunately, we have the Holy Spirit, God's abiding presence, who can lead us into all truth.

Being a Christian is not meant to be easy, and no one who reads the gospels could think otherwise. The way of Jesus can be a source of profoundly deep joy, as we are offered a way to live as God hopes: for love alone. Being a follower of Jesus means that we will "take up our cross" and follow him, that we will choose the difficult path at times, but it is not easy to overcome our intrinsic fears and selfishness. Being a follower of Jesus means we will proclaim Jesus Christ to all people, teaching them about his commandments.

Most of this book is an exploration of what it means to be an Episcopal or Anglican Christian. We believe there is not just one way to be a Christian, but we are head-over-heels in love with the Anglican way of following Jesus. You will read more in the chapters to come, but the shortest version is that Anglican Christianity is a way of following Jesus that is rooted in the Bible and the sacraments of the church, united by shared ways of praying. We will unpack that in the chapters to come.

In This Book

After sharing what we see as the Anglican or Episcopal understanding of prayer (Chapter 1), we move through the sacraments of the church (Chapters 2-8). We spend a bit more time on baptism and eucharist, since they are the primary sacraments. We turn next to how the church keeps time, including daily cycles (Chapter 9) and yearly cycles (Chapter 10). We look very closely at Holy Week, the most important week of the year for a Christian (Chapter 11). And we look at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, funerals, and burial (Chapter 12).

Because our faith is not just about liturgy but also about beliefs, we explore some basic teachings. We discuss the ancient creeds (Chapter 13) and how we read the Bible (Chapter 14). The idea of salvation or redemption only makes sense if we talk about sin and grace, so we do that in Chapter 15. This section wraps up with a chapter on prayer (Chapter 16).

The church itself is an important part of our faith, so we spend time exploring the community of people who follow Jesus. Chapter 17 is an overview of church, while Chapter 18 explores how we Episcopalians organize ourselves. Chapter 19 reminds us that the church is not just the living holy ones but also those who have gone before us, the holy ones who dwell with God as saints. And Chapter 20 considers how we are all called to follow Jesus in particular ways.

The next three chapters look at how we might care for God's creation (Chapter 21), at the implications of God

having become human in Jesus Christ (Chapter 22), and at how we nurture the spiritual gifts that God has given us (Chapter 23). Finally, we end with encouragement to continue as followers of Jesus. We share spiritual practices, such as daily prayer or service of others (Chapter 24). Lastly, we hope you will learn how God's story is your story and how you might share that story with a world in need (Chapters 25 and 26).

How to Use This Book

We encourage you to have a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer* handy as you read *Walk in Love.* You'll want the 1979 version of the Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer*; you can find a free PDF online or buy a copy at your favorite bookseller. Maybe your priest will loan or give you a copy. There are numerous citations from *The Book of Common Prayer*, including collects (or prayers) that start each chapter. We encourage you to look up the citations in *The Book of Common Prayer* to provide tangible connections between beliefs and practices. Whenever you see a number by itself, framed by parentheses, that is a page number in *The Book of Common Prayer.*

You can certainly read your way through *Walk in Love* on your own. Maybe your curiosity is stoked by something in one of the chapters, and so we have provided some suggestions for additional reading or exploration.

A book group could make productive use of *Walk in Love*, relying on the discussion questions here to get things going. Hopefully your group will have a rich

conversation. This book's publisher, Forward Movement, also offers a free downloadable course about Episcopal beliefs and practices, *Practicing Our Faith.* Funded in part by a generous grant by the Constable Fund of the Episcopal Church, the curriculum is available for children, youth, and adults in English and Spanish. This course, *Practicing Our Faith*, is part of a three-year set of courses; the others are *Celebrating the Saints* and *Exploring the Bible.* You can learn about these offerings at www.forwardmovement.org.

About This Book

We developed much of what you read here as we worked together as parish priests in Rhode Island. As you can tell, we spent a lot of time and energy thinking about liturgy, the prayer book, and the Bible. We witnessed the fruits of that work as lives were transformed by Jesus Christ and people were drawn into deeper commitment to following Jesus in their daily lives.

When we tell stories here, we use "I." Sometimes that "I" is Melody writing, and sometimes it is Scott. Don't worry too much about that, and just enjoy the stories.

We hope you find this book helpful. More than that, we hope you fall in love with Jesus just a bit more through a deep and abiding life of prayer and enriched beliefs.

Scott Gunn
Cincinnati, Ohio

Melody Wilson Shobe
Dallas, Texas

The Anglican Way of Christianity

Chapter 1

Not Only with Our Lips, But in Our Lives

Beliefs and Practices

As a priest, having a favorite prayer is perhaps similar to having a favorite child: How could you possibly pick one? There are things beloved and beautiful about so many different prayers; each has its strengths and its moments. When people ask me about my favorite prayers, I usually wax poetical about the wonderful diversity of *The Book of Common Prayer*, which contains thousands of options for prayers for nearly every circumstance and situation. I might rattle off a list of my favorites of the day, while encouraging people to explore the riches of the prayer book for themselves. I also remind people that we aren't limited to the forms of *The Book of Common Prayer*: Prayer is "responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words" (856). We can pray using scripted prayers, by using our own words, or using no words at all. The options are, quite literally, limitless!

But let me tell you a secret. The truth is, I do have a favorite. If I could only pray one prayer for the rest of my life, it would be the General Thanksgiving from Morning Prayer, especially the traditional-language (Rite I) version.

> Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
> we thine unworthy servants

do give thee most humble and hearty thanks
for all thy goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all men.
We bless thee for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for thine inestimable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And, we beseech thee,
give us that due sense of all thy mercies,
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful;
and that we show forth thy praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to thy service,
and by walking before thee
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost,
be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 58-59

This prayer is my favorite for a host of reasons. One is nostalgia. I grew up in a church that said Morning Prayer on a regular basis. Through sheer repetition, The General Thanksgiving was one of the first prayers I memorized as a child, right alongside the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. I love this prayer with a child's devotion, the way I love Winnie the Pooh or macaroni and cheese. It resonates for me because it is a part of my story, a part of who I am.

It is also my favorite because I am a bibliophile, and I am in love with the poetry and language of this prayer. I remember coming home from church one day in about fourth grade and looking up the words inestimable and unfeignedly in the dictionary. I loved how they sounded on my tongue and was delighted to learn what they meant. As a child, saying such big, beautiful, mysterious words felt holy to me, a reminder that I love and follow a God who is big and beautiful and mysterious. Those beautiful, mysterious words, so different from our everyday speech, continue to connect me with God's holiness today.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this prayer of thanksgiving is my favorite because of the line: "...that we may show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives..." If the poetry isn't stunning enough, this sentiment will stop you in your tracks: not only with our lips, but in our lives. We are called to offer God praise, not simply in what we say, but also with what we do. God doesn't want lip service; God wants life service. An intimate, unbreakable connection exists between the words that we say in prayer and the things that we do in our daily lives.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi

This line from my favorite prayer articulates a foundational principle of the Episcopal Church: *Lex orandi, lex credendi.* This Latin phrase is loosely translated "the law of prayer is the law of belief." Or, said another way, "you are what you pray." In the Episcopal

Church, prayer, belief, and action are intimately tied together.

The more we pray something, the more deeply it becomes a part of us. We are shaped by the prayers that we pray, as both the act of prayer and the content of those prayers inform how we think about ourselves and the world. Even more than shaping our beliefs, our prayers shape our actions, pushing us to live out in our daily lives the things we have said with our lips. Our prayers demand that we ask ourselves some difficult questions: How does what we say on Sunday inform how we think on Thursday? What do our prayers and beliefs call us to *do* on Monday and Tuesday and every other day? As we pray, we are shaped by our prayers, so that over time, with God's help, we become the very things for which we pray. In this way, *The Book of Common Prayer* is the source, not only of the prayers that the Episcopal Church uses regularly but also of the content of our beliefs and the guideline for how we practice our faith.

The Book of Common Prayer

The Episcopal Church is defined by how we worship, which is guided by *The Book of Common Prayer.* And the way we pray is what binds together the Anglican Communion—a worldwide communion that includes the Episcopal Church. Our pattern of prayer is both ancient and modern, drawing on the tradition of the church through the centuries and responding to the

needs and concerns of faithful Christians in this day and age.

The Anglican Communion is the third largest Christian communion in the world, after the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. It includes 85 million people in over 165 countries. Learn more about the Anglican Communion at www.anglicancommunion.org.

The Book of Common Prayer was first published in 1549 under the direction of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury. The book was the result of an extraordinary idea: The prayers that we say in worship should be held in common, that is, they should be available to all people in their native language. Prior to the publication of *The Book of Common Prayer*, books of liturgy were mostly reserved for clergy (bishops, priests, and deacons) and monastics (monks and nuns). These books also were largely written in Latin, a language spoken by only the educated elite. In the wake of the Reformation, Cranmer and others believed that prayer, like scripture, should be available to all people, clergy and laity alike, and that people should be able to read and understand the prayers of the church in their own language.

From this deep conviction arose *The Book of Common Prayer.* Some of the prayers in *The Book of Common Prayer* were written by Cranmer himself. With the sensibility of a poet, he crafted words to give voice to the deep longings of human hearts and to put us in conversation with God. But for many other prayers, Cranmer relied on centuries of tradition, painstakingly translating into

English prayers that had been passed down through the generations, reaching back to the earliest celebrations of the eucharist and creating a living connection with our ancestors. The first *Book of Common Prayer* was ancient and modern, holding on to patterns of prayer that were hundreds of years old yet speaking in the language of its time.

In writing that first *Book of Common Prayer*, Cranmer also sought to find a *via media*, a middle way, between Catholic and Protestant sensibilities. It was a time when the church was still being rocked by the waves of the Protestant Reformation. In response to the criticisms levied against the Roman Catholic Church, many were willing to throw the baby out with the bathwater, changing their practice of prayer radically so as to sever any connection with the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Cranmer and others sought a middle ground, a liturgy that retained some aspects of Catholic thought and practice while being informed by the best of Protestant theology. Finding that middle way was costly, angering extremists on both sides. It ultimately led to Cranmer's execution for heresy when Roman Catholic Queen Mary took the throne. But the legacy of *via media* lives on as a foundational principle in our *Book of Common Prayer* and in Episcopal/Anglican belief and practice.

Ancient Prayers

The 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* included some wonderful collects composed for that first edition, and we still use some of these prayers today.

O Almighty God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (p. 178)

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that, by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (p. 184)

Thomas Cranmer and his team also made use of some ancient prayers that they translated for use in 1549.

Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honor and glory, world without end. Amen. (p. 160. This prayer is based on a liturgical book from the eighth century called the *Gelasian Sacramentary*).

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee,

the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (p. 166, also from the *Gelasian Sacramentary*)

If you would like to learn more about the origin of different prayers in *The Book of Common Prayer*, refer to *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* by Marion J. Hatchett.

Over the years, *The Book of Common Prayer* has been edited and revised a number of times, with each iteration balancing the ancient with the modern, seeking a middle way between extremes. The Church of England still uses the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, which bears a great resemblance to the original 1549 edition. The Episcopal Church in the United States of America adopted its first *Book of Common Prayer* in 1789; that *Book of Common Prayer* was deeply informed by both the original *Book of Common Prayer* and the Scottish Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer* currently authorized for use in the Episcopal Church was last revised in 1979. All of the congregations across the Episcopal Church are expected to worship according to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Praying as a Community

When we come together each week and pray according to *The Book of Common Prayer*, we are praying, in a deep sense, as a community. Our liturgy—the words and

actions of worship—is not about "each man for himself," or about how "*I* like to pray" or even how the priest likes to pray. Instead, we are keeping a tradition of worship that stretches through time and is shaped by a tradition of prayer that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Our prayers connect us not only through time but also through space to all the other members of the Anglican Communion, a worldwide body bound by a shared history and shared worship. While Anglican congregations across the globe have varying beliefs and practices, Anglican Communion churches are all connected, in some way, to the Church of England, and each has a prayer book that has been influenced and informed by *The Book of Common Prayer.* If you visit an Anglican church anywhere in the world, you will have a basic idea of what is going on. Even if you can't understand a word of the language being spoken, the order of service and the actions of worship will be very familiar.

Liturgy is a commonly misunderstood term, with people saying that it means work of the people, suggesting that participation by everyone in the gathering is the point. While it is surely important for each person in a eucharistic gathering to participate in her or his own way, this is not what liturgy is about. A better translation of the Greek word is public work. Back in ancient Greece, people offered a liturgy if they donated money for a civic building, for example. Liturgy was an offering for the good of all people, for the public. In this way, our liturgies are meant to

be public works, that is, offerings for the good of the whole world.

All Episcopal priests take a vow at their ordination to the priesthood to be faithful to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church. At baptism and again at confirmation, every Episcopalian promises "to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers." Note that this promise doesn't say prayer but rather "in the prayers." In baptism and confirmation, we commit to more than a general idea of prayer; we promise to pray *like this* and *in community. The Book of Common Prayer* contains the prayers that we promise to be faithful to—the prayers that mark us both as Christians and as Episcopalians.

Breadth and Opportunity

Now, a person might hear about these promises of prayer and think that *The Book of Common Prayer* is a straitjacket that limits and restricts how we interact with God. Nothing could be further from the truth. One of the greatest gifts of *The Book of Common Prayer* is its breadth. *The Book of Common Prayer* offers tremendous opportunity for creativity and diversity.

The Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer* is not an eternal, stagnant document; it has been revised, sometimes significantly, multiple times since the first American version in 1789. But the prayer book is also not meant to be taken lightly or to be subject to whims and passing fads. Because we believe that we

are shaped by what we pray, the form and content of these prayers matters deeply. For that reason, revision of *The Book of Common Prayer* is a lengthy process.

Any revision to *The Book of Common Prayer*, whether it is the matter of a few words or significant changes, requires approval by majority vote in both houses at two successive meetings of the General Convention, which meets every three years. This means that it takes a minimum of six years to revise the prayer book, and any revision requires the input and majority support of all the orders of ministry: bishops, priests, deacons, and lay people.

- The prayer book includes an incredible variety of liturgies, including Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism, marriage and burial, confirmation and ordination.

But there are also forms—guides for worship—for daily prayer, including Daily Devotions and the Daily Office, an ordered routine of praying at different times throughout the day. In addition, the prayer book features prayers for those who are sick and for grace at meals, for victims of addiction, for schools and colleges, for rain and for travelers, and many more.

- Most liturgies offer forms of prayer for Rite I and Rite II—essentially two versions of the prayers that espouse the same principles. This can seem confusing, but it is actually a beautiful part of our Anglican heritage, another way that we hold onto the ancient while also responding to the world around us. Rite I is full of thees and thous, the more formal and traditional language that echoes the earliest

prayer books. It is a language of beauty, poetry, and mystery. Rite II is more contemporary, changing the thees and thous to yous and translating some of the more complex words and concepts so they are easier to understand, while still holding on to the beauty and tradition. In this way our *Book of Common Prayer* is both ancient and modern, and our prayers benefit from a greater richness because we have many options.

- Even within the language of a certain rite, there is a great deal of variety. In Rite II Holy Eucharist, for example, there are four different options for eucharistic prayers: A, B, C, and D. Each eucharistic prayer uses different phrases and images to draw us into the mystery of Holy Eucharist. For instance, Eucharistic Prayer D is connected to some of the oldest eucharistic prayers, grounding us in ancient tradition. Eucharistic Prayer C talks about outer space, reminding us of our modern context. The different prayers emphasize different aspects of our understanding of God, in order to help us have a greater appreciation for what happens when we come together for Holy Communion.

- In addition to the different liturgies, *The Book of Common Prayer* is also attentive to the different seasons of the church year. The liturgies offer various options for opening greetings, prayers, and refrains that reflect the different times of the church year. From Advent to Lent to Epiphany to Easter, the seasonal options give our prayers context and nuance.

- While *The Book of Common Prayer* does have some requirements, much is left unwritten as well. This allows for a great variety of practice, from the vestments that people wear, the decorations on the altar, and the colors of the seasons to the hymns, anthems, and instrumental music of our worship.

- *The Book of Common Prayer* also includes more openended liturgies for Holy Eucharist (400), marriage (435), and burial (506). This approach leaves room for flexibility and adaptation while staying within the parameters and wisdom of our faith. These rites "require careful preparation by the Priest and other participants" (400) and include certain prayers to be said or guidelines to be followed. But the rites also allow congregations to respond to specific pastoral needs while remaining bound by common prayer.

- Actions such as when we cross ourselves, processions into and out of church, whether or not to use incense, and many other things, are decisions for individual communities.

Worship according to *The Book of Common Prayer* offers unity in the midst of diversity, allowing individual congregations to have both variety and constancy. Many aspects of prayer and worship are the same across all Episcopal churches, no matter where they are located, while other components differ from one community to the next.

Praying with Our Bodies

Prayer is a full-contact sport. Prayer is not just a matter of the mind or the mouth—it is a matter of the whole body. It is meant to involve every part of ourselves. We live out that reality in worship by the different actions we use when we pray. *The Book of Common Prayer* sometimes directs us to sit, sometimes to stand, sometimes to kneel. Sometimes we are told to speak, sometimes to remain silent, other times to sing. Some people even include actions: crossing themselves at certain moments, bowing their heads at the name of Jesus, and genuflecting (dropping to one knee in reverence) before the altar. The different actions can make it seem like we aren't engaged in prayer but rather Episcopal aerobics! The truth is that these different actions and postures of prayer help us to engage our *whole selves* in worship. They are ways of living out the truth that we praise God "not only with our lips, but in our lives."

By actively engaging our bodies in prayer, we acknowledge that prayer demands more than just our words. We proclaim in our actions that God wants all of us—and that we are offering all of ourselves to God.

Our actions and our motions are only part of our prayers; worship involves all of the senses. In worship, we see light and darkness as candles flicker, and we see the variety of colors in changing vestments, church hangings, and stained glass windows. We hear music sung or played and words spoken and chanted, and we

experience silence that tells its own story. We smell the beeswax of burning candles, the holy perfume of incense, the beautiful scent of anointing oil. We taste the bread and wine. And we touch: the smooth surface of altar rails, the thin pages of prayer books and hymnals, the hands of our neighbors and strangers. Our worship engages all of our selves: our bodies and souls, our mouths and our movements. And it engages all of our senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Our prayer is embodied action.

This tenet extends beyond our worship. Praising God "not only with our lips, but in our lives" means that our prayers must shape the way we live, not only for an hour on Sunday but also for every hour of every day of every week for our entire lives. We don't just involve our bodies in worship on Sunday by kneeling or standing, smelling and tasting. We involve our bodies in worship every day, by living in our lives what our lips profess in prayer. Praising God involves more than just the prayers we say or the things we believe; it includes the way we *practice* our faith on a daily basis.

What we pray is incredibly important, because it both shapes and reflects what we believe. And what we believe is incredibly important, because it both shapes and reflects how we live. Prayer changes us, in deep and meaningful ways.

As a priest, I have had the precious gift of praying with people as they age and when they are dying. Again and again, I have prayed with someone who suffers from dementia or Alzheimer's or a person who is non-responsive, who doesn't seem aware of what is going on or is unable to respond in any way. Yet when I start the

Lord's Prayer, more often than not, that non-responsive, largely non-verbal person will begin praying along. The words might be mumbled or difficult to decipher. She might be a few beats behind me or say only certain phrases. But even if he's forgotten nearly everything else, he remembers the Lord's Prayer. Prayers that we pray often and repeatedly become so much a part of us that we remember them on an instinctive, visceral level.

Prayer changes our brains and our behavior. What we say and do on Sunday informs and shapes how we act and think on Thursday and Monday and every other day. When we spend our time in prayer focused on gratitude, we become more grateful people. When we pray for peace, we begin to act more peacefully. Our prayers become a deep and meaningful part of us, words that are truly learned "by heart," being taken into ourselves and shaping us.

For Reflection

- What is your favorite prayer, and why is it your favorite?
- Do certain lines from prayers come to mind during your daily life? What are they and when do you think about them?
- What does the baptismal promise "to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers" mean to you? How have you lived up to that promise in your life? How could you do better?
- What are some of the gifts of scripted, common prayer like those in *The Book of Common Prayer*? What are some of the difficulties with this kind of prayer?

Chapter 2

The New Life of Grace

Baptismal Beliefs

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 308

Prayer—our conversation with God, both spoken and silent—is an important way to experience God in our lives. But it is not the only way. In the Episcopal Church, sacraments loom large. In the sacraments, we experience grace, which our prayer book defines as "God's favor towards us, unearned and undeserved; by grace God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills" (858). While God's grace absolutely comes in infinite ways, even outside the church, we know that the sacraments are "sure and certain" means of grace.

The classic definition of sacraments says they are "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace." In other words, sacraments are an external manifestation of something that happens internally. To put it another way, they are earthly signs of heavenly activity. For example, when we baptize someone, the outward sign is water, but, inside, the person is changed.

It's important to emphasize that the sacraments are not the only way to receive grace; the grace of God's love and blessing comes to us in our daily lives in many ways. At the same time, however, when we partake in the sacraments, we can be confident of receiving God's grace. Furthermore, sacraments are not mere symbols. In the Holy Eucharist, the bread and wine are not simply reminders of Jesus' last meal with his friends, but they become Jesus' Body and Blood. We can be confident that Christ is truly present in the eucharist, and that in receiving Holy Communion we receive God's grace.

Anglicans don't always agree on the number of sacraments. During the Reformation period in the 1500s and 1600s, our forbearers focused on two sacraments: baptism and eucharist. Later on, in the nineteenth century especially, Anglicans began to talk about seven sacraments. Today, we often divide the sacraments into two categories. The dominical sacraments (taught by Jesus) are baptism and eucharist.

And the five ecclesial sacraments (taught by the church) are confirmation, healing (unction), reconciliation (confession), marriage, and ordination. Our *Book of Common Prayer* is somewhat inconsistent but usually calls the first two "sacraments" and the last five "sacramental rites." In terms of our theology though, all seven are clearly sacramental: They are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.

Holy Baptism

Baptism is the first sacrament. It is the first one Jesus taught. We may think of baptism as the sacrament of birth, because baptism is often carried out with infants. But we should look at baptism in a broader context, as the sacrament of beginning for all new Christians. Even adults begin their new life and journey as disciples of Jesus Christ at their baptism.

Jesus did not invent baptism. He took an existing practice and completely redefined it. In the ancient world, as is the case today, many religions made use of ritual baths. In Jesus' time, many Jews understood baptism to be a cleansing, a way to wash away sins. Some sects even understood baptism to be part of rituals for entry; baptism was required for membership.

In the New Testament, the famous practitioner of Jewish baptism was John the Baptist (hence the name!). John spent his days calling people to be transformed and to be prepared for the Messiah who was to come soon. He spoke of his own practice of baptism, saying, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (Matthew 3:11a). But John added an important teaching, "one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11b).

Jesus adopted the idea of a cleansing ritual required for entry into a community. And just as John had promised, Jesus' baptism added new dimensions, starting with his baptism by John in the Jordan River.

> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)

At his own baptism, Jesus was blessed by God's presence for all to see. This dramatically introduced the coming of the Holy Spirit in baptism, and Jesus continued to teach this as the way of beginning a new life of faith. From that moment in the Jordan River, Jesus and his followers continued—to this very day—a baptism that is by water and the Holy Spirit.

Soon after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the earliest Christians began to teach baptism as an essential part of the Christian life. Saint Paul teaches,

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

In most Episcopal churches today, our practice of baptism symbolizes the experience with a pouring or sprinkling of water over the person's head instead of full immersion. What is important is that we use water and that we do the baptism in the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whether we use a few drops of water or dunk someone in a pool, whether the baptism takes place in an ornate font (a bowl of sorts that holds the

water for baptism) or an outdoor stream, the same thing is accomplished: We are made new in Christ.

Saint Paul conveys two important ideas. First, baptism is the way to enter into the church, the Body of Christ Jesus. Second, in baptism, we die to our old selves and rise to new life in Christ. This aspect of baptism is perhaps more clear when the person being baptized is plunged under the water and then raised. Whether an infant or an adult, there is something bold about seeing someone symbolically drowned and raised to new life!

Union with Christ

Today when we speak about baptism, we continue to understand it as a complex of interrelated actions. Our prayer book says baptism is "union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit" (858). Let us look at each of these actions.

- **Union with Christ in his death and resurrection.** This is exactly what Saint Paul talks about in Romans. We are mystically joined with Christ when we are baptized. The old, sinful self dies. A new person is raised to life, and we receive the

promise that we too will be raised at the last day, at the resurrection of the dead.

- **Birth into God's family, the church.** Baptism is the entry to the church, to the community of those who have committed themselves to follow Jesus. But it is more than a membership requirement; in baptism, we are adopted into God's family.

- **Forgiveness of sins.** To understand this one, we have to back up, all the way to creation. The church understands that humans were all made in God's image, and we humans were made wholly good. Then, we were given freedom, and we made poor choices that resulted in the fallenness of humanity, the idea that we are ruined by sin. We have squandered the goodness and freedom that God gave us, and, left to our own devices, we will continue in this fallen, sinful way of living. Through baptism, we are cleansed from this curse of sin. We are made clean and new in baptism.

- **New life in the Holy Spirit.** As Jesus was leaving his friends, he promised that God the Father would send the Holy Spirit to abide with Jesus' followers, the church. The entire Book of Acts is the story of Christ's people living with the presence of the Holy Spirit, and it is our story, too!

Though not every Christian will see the complexity of baptism in exactly the same

way, baptism is the one sacrament that nearly all Christians recognize as universal. When a baptized person wants to join an Episcopal church, all that is required is a record of their existing baptism. As long as the baptism involved water and was done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is considered valid. The same is true for Episcopalians who might join another denomination or church. Nearly every church around the world will recognize each other's baptism.

Some Christians reserve baptism as a sacrament only for adults. These Christians usually believe that baptism requires understanding. Episcopalians have a different view of the sacrament, believing that God's grace is present in the sacrament even when we do not understand how or what is happening. Therefore, we baptize people of all ages, including infants, believing that God's grace is surely and certainly present. It is then the responsibility of parents and godparents to raise the child in faith, helping the child to grow into promises made on his or her behalf.

Most of the time, baptisms are performed by clergy in churches, in the community that represents the Body of Christ. But of all the sacraments, baptism is the one that can be performed by anyone, anywhere, in an emergency. Talk to nurses, especially in places where babies are born, and you may hear stories of emergency baptism for

deathly ill infants. In these situations, all that is required is water and simple words. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Just a dab of water and these words make a person the recipient of every benefit of baptism.

Baptismal candidates are always supported by sponsors, whether the candidates are adults, children, or infants. We colloquially call the sponsors of younger children "godparents" but they are really sponsors, just like any other. Sponsors help candidates or their parents prepare for baptism with the intention to "support them by prayer and example in their Christian life." Being a sponsor is not just an honor but a major commitment to a life of Christian mentoring and support. Sponsors answer on behalf of infants who cannot speak for themselves in the baptismal liturgy, and they signify their role in adult and older children's baptisms by presenting the candidates to the priest.

Sometimes babies who have received emergency baptism get well, and the family later wants a public celebration in the church. We have a way of celebrating these baptisms that does not repeat baptism—because baptism is permanent and indelible—but allows the congregation to welcome a child into the church.

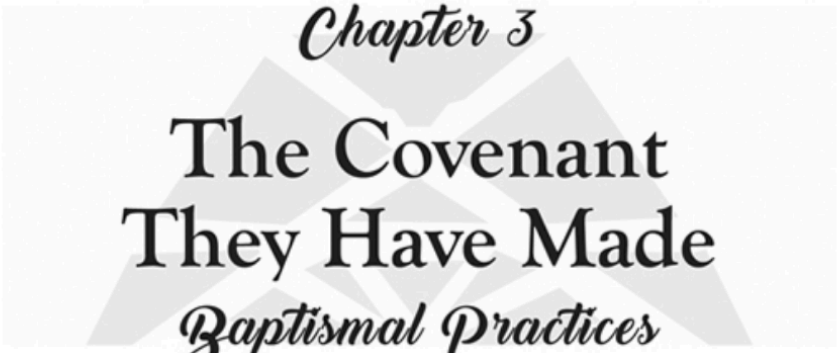
For Reflection

- How have you experienced inward and spiritual grace through one of the sacraments?

- The prayer book mentions four aspects of baptism: "Union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit." What is important about each of these emphases?

- Our scriptures and liturgies make a strong connection between baptism and death. What are some of the things that we die to in our baptism, and how is our relationship with death changed by the waters of baptism?

- Through the waters of baptism, we are raised to the new life of grace. What are some of the qualities or characteristics of this new life?



Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 214

Every journey begins somewhere, and every Christian's journey in the church begins with Holy Baptism. While God may very well be working in our lives before we are baptized, it is this sacrament that unites us with Christ and his church. Another way to view Holy Baptism is to see it as the gateway to all the other sacraments. Holy Baptism is usually celebrated on Sunday mornings so the whole church community can join in the grand occasion. Much of the service is similar to every other Sunday service, but there are some differences. In this chapter, we will explore some of the features unique to a service of Holy Baptism, and then we'll talk

about some of the "stuff" that we use during the baptism. As you read this chapter, we encourage you to follow along in the service for Holy Baptism; it begins on page 299 of the prayer book.

After the usual words at the beginning of a Sunday service, a special set of responses for baptism are said or sung.

Celebrant	There is one Body and one Spirit;
People	There is one hope in God's call to us;
Celebrant	One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;
People	One God and Father of all.

These words come from the fourth chapter of Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Paul wrote to the Ephesians to teach about the unity of the entire church—of all people—in Christ. In baptism, all our distinctions—sex, nationality, race, and so on—become less important than our unity in Christ. By placing these words at the beginning of the service, we are reminded that the newly baptized will soon be full members of Christ's body, the Church.

The readings and the sermon then continue as if at a regular Sunday service. The next departure from the usual service comes just after the sermon. The priest invites the candidate(s) for baptism to be presented.

If the baptismal candidate is an infant, the sponsors (godparents) and parents answer questions on the candidate's behalf. Otherwise, older children and adults answer for themselves. Every priest and parent will have a bit of terror when a child is asked the question, "Do you desire to be baptized?" Although young children can be unpredictable, we must ask the question! We can only proceed if the answer is yes, because Christians have long taught that baptism is not to be offered coercively, but only to the willing.

In the early centuries of the church, baptism was reserved to bishops, and local priests did not perform baptisms. Bishops were the primary officiants because baptism is a sign of entry into the larger, universal church rather than simply entry into the local church community. Part of a bishop's role is as a symbol of the unity of the universal church; every bishop ordained in the Episcopal Church has been ordained by the laying on of hands by other bishops who can trace their ordinations back to the very first apostles (this is called apostolic succession). So the bishop connects us to the wider church around the world and to the church through the ages, from the earliest apostles, through our history, and to the present day.

As the church grew and expanded, it became impractical for all baptisms to wait until the bishop's visit, and local priests were given the authority to baptize new believers. We keep the presence of the bishop in baptism by using the oil of chrism, which is always consecrated by a bishop, as a sign of the connection of baptism to the wider church.

Today baptisms are most often performed by priests, unless a bishop is present, or by a deacon or others in certain circumstances.

Next, if the candidate is an infant or child, the celebrant asks the parents and sponsors two questions. "Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life?" and "Will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?" To both questions, the answer is "I will, with God's help." We won't succeed at either goal if we don't rely on God's help.

The first question comes because we are baptizing infants who cannot answer for themselves. We do this because others are making promises on their behalf. Sponsors and parents are agreeing to a lifetime commitment of raising the child in the Christian faith. This is one reason why it is important for parents and sponsors to be

active, practicing followers of Jesus. Without that, there's little hope that this promise to God, made in front of a congregation, will be kept.

The second question highlights a critical point. Raising the child in faith is not just about knowledge and facts; it is about transformation. The promise is to "help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ"—which is also a good reminder that we're never quite done. None of us will ever become exactly like Christ. But we can try to be more and more like him, offering perfect love. It is important to note that we pledge to show the child (and others) how to be like Christ through "prayers and witness." That is, we teach and others learn through both our prayers and our actions. We must live our lives in a way that shows others who Christ is and how to be like him, and we must be people of prayer. These are the promises we are making. They are a tall order, which is why we say, "I will, with God's help."

In baptism, we are turning toward Christ. To turn toward one thing means to turn away from another, so next, the candidates, parents, and sponsors renounce Satan.

Question	Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?
Answer	I renounce them.

Question Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Answer I renounce them.

Question Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Answer I renounce them.

It isn't fashionable to talk about Satan and the power of evil these days, but it is essential. Look at the front page of any newspaper and the feeds of any social media channel or have honest conversations with people about their deepest struggles. Evil powers are real. We Christians should not be afraid of them because we know that on Easter, Jesus utterly defeated the worst evil imaginable. We should be confident that we can defeat evil, which is why we should not be afraid to look it in the face. In the service of baptism, we consciously acknowledge the reality of evil and then actively turn away from it.

Question Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?

Answer I do.

Question Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Answer I do.

Question Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

Answer I do.

Just as we turn away from Satan and evil power, we turn toward Jesus Christ and the power of love. These are big promises. Putting our "whole trust" in "grace and love" is easier said than done! To trust in Christ's love and grace is to know that we are loved no matter what we do, that Jesus is with us in whatever we face. To accept him as our Savior is to know that our salvation will not be found in power, money, prestige, family, or friends but only in Jesus Christ. To "follow and obey" acknowledges that we don't have the answers, but that we find our direction, our compass, our hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The depth and radical nature of these promises takes a lifetime to understand and fully embrace.

The celebrant addresses the next question to the whole congregation. Each person in the congregation is asked, "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" The answer should be, "We will." This question is brief but important. We who are the church promise to support those who are baptized. We promise to help them grow into the full stature of Christ. There are no asterisks or exceptions about us helping only when it is convenient or when we feel like it. Indeed, we promise to support these persons for their

entire lives, to do all in our power. *All in our power.* The service of baptism is full of big promises!

Baptismal Covenant

We then join in renewing our Baptismal Covenant. This set of eight questions-and-answers affirms our faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and then we commit to a life of Christian faith and discipline.

First we are asked to restate our faith in God as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We state our faith using the Apostles' Creed, which has been associated with baptism since the early church. In the first centuries of the church, when Christians were often persecuted, unbaptized persons were dismissed from the liturgy before creeds were recited. During that period, the very first time people could hear or recite the creeds was at their baptism. The Nicene Creed is normally used for regular Sunday celebrations of Holy Eucharist; the Apostles' Creed is more ancient and associated with baptism.

Celebrant

Do you believe in God the Father?

People

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son
of God?

People

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,
our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of
the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was
buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the
right hand
of the Father.
He will come again to judge the
living and
the dead.

Celebrant

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.

The Apostles' Creed summarizes some of the basic teachings of our faith. We profess that God the Father has created everything. We profess that God the Son was born, crucified, raised to new life, and will come again as judge. We profess faith in God the Holy Spirit, in the communion of the saints, and in the grace of having sins forgiven. We profess our trust in God's promise of eternal life and our commitment to the catholic church. The word catholic here (and throughout our liturgies in the prayer book) means universal —the one, worldwide church of Jesus Christ.

Baptismal Promises

After we pray the Apostles' Creed, we ask and answer five questions. These are called the baptismal promises. In these promises, we make extraordinary, impossible commitments that we will never manage to get totally right, especially on our own. Our hope of fulfilling these promises is possible only through God who works in us. That is why we answer, "I will, with God's help."

We promise to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. We are saying that we will participate in Christian worship, attend classes to learn about our faith, join in the celebration of Holy Eucharist, and pray daily, both as a community and as individuals. To live out this promise, we need to put worshiping with a Christian community at the top of our priority list, not a do-it-when-I-feel-like-it activity. This baptismal promise comes from the Book of Acts, when the earliest Christians found great joy in committing to follow Jesus in community. We too will experience great joy when we make our community of Christ-followers the priority.

We promise to persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, to repent and return to the Lord. We are saying we will actively turn away from those things that we know to be evil, even if they are alluring. And we are promising to do what is necessary to be reconciled with God and with one another when we sin (not if, but when). Our world is full of things that take us away from God (money, power, selfish desires). In this promise, we acknowledge these things and say we will resist them. We also admit that we're going to get this wrong and promise that we will try again. Our faith

gives us as many do-overs as we need. What we promise here is to try our best.

We promise to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. We are saying that we will share our faith, share the gospel, share the message of Jesus with anyone and everyone. We will proclaim it both with words and with the example of our lives —not just one or the other. This promise might be hard for Episcopalians: We are called to talk about our faith with other people...perhaps even strangers! We will look at the important topic of evangelism in Chapters 25 and 26.

We promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. We are saying that we will look for Jesus in all we meet, even when it might be hard for us to see him. We will serve others, whether we feel like it or not, as though they were Christ himself. This is very easy to say and very hard to do. Christian love is not the same as being nice, and it has nothing to do with convenience. We are promising that we will speak the truth in love when others need to hear it, that we will help strangers just as much as we help family, and that we will make room for the needs of others, always.

We promise to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the

dignity of every human being. We are saying that we will work for justice and peace. And we will make our own best effort to respect every human being, whether we look like them or not, whether we agree with them or not, whether we think they deserve it or not. Think of the people who are most challenging for you: terrorists or others who wish you harm, very rich people, very poor people, liberals, loud people, conservatives, introverts, or whomever. We Christians are called to respect and to treat with dignity every single person on this planet as a beautiful being who bears God's image.

After reminding ourselves of the very challenging Christian life we—and those who are being baptized—have signed up for, we pray. These lovely prayers invite God to be known to the newly baptized and to gradually open our lives and hearts to God's presence.

Water

Finally! We get to the water, the main symbol of baptism, the outward and visible sign. Baptism almost always takes place with a font, which might be an elaborately carved stone basin on a fancy stand, a wooden stand with a brass bowl, a simple table with a glass bowl, or even a built-in pool that people can

wade in—or something else. Baptisms can even take place outdoors, in a stream or a lake.

The celebrant blesses the water using a prayer that merits our attention: It speaks of the sacred purpose of water from the beginning of creation and throughout salvation history. The prayer recalls the fundamental purpose of baptism, and it ends with praise to God.

> We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.
>
> We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

> Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior. To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.* (306)

Then the candidates are presented by name to the minister who will baptize them. Candidates are baptized, starting with their name, and then with the same phrase Christians have used for hundreds of years: "*N.*, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We never change these words, because baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is universally recognized. If we failed to use those words, some Christians would say that the baptism isn't valid.

This point is an important one, because the two invariable things about baptism are water and these words. We can use any kind of water; we don't need a fancy font or special water. My liturgy professor said that in an emergency, we could even use our own spit! But we need water. And we must say the words, "*N.*, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Several years ago I was presiding at a baptism in Ecuador where most of the congregation spoke Spanish or Quechua, a language of indigenous people in Ecuador. I spoke Spanish for most of the service, but

when it came to the baptism, I wanted to use Quechua, the native language of the boy who was being baptized. I practiced for hours. But when the time came, I very quietly said the words again in English. I was worried that I might have said them wrong, and I wanted to make sure that the boy's baptism "stuck!"

After the actual baptism when water is poured over the head, we say a prayer over the newly baptized. Then the celebrant anoints the newly baptized with oil. This oil, called chrism, has been blessed by a bishop and through this blessing, is a symbol of connection to the universal church. The minister places the oil on the baptized person's forehead and makes the sign of a cross, saying, "*N.*, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. *Amen.*"

Following the anointing (or sometimes the baptism itself, depending on which option one chooses), the celebrant offers a lovely prayer that encapsulates the baptized person's new life of grace-filled living.

> Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of

joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.* (308)

After the anointing, the entire congregation welcomes the newly baptized, using these words: "We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood" (308). Once we are baptized, we have been claimed by Christ forever. Nothing we do or say can take away the spiritual mantle of Christ that we have received in baptism. After the anointing, the entire congregation welcomes the newly baptized. Then we share in the Peace of Christ. For the first time, the newly baptized person shares this sign of peace as a member of Christ's body, the church.

The rest of the service unfolds like a regular service of Holy Eucharist, though it is a very special occasion. For the first time, the newly baptized person, regardless of age, will receive Holy Communion. Even infants who are baptized can be communicated with a tiny drop of wine. I used to tell parents that if they were willing, this is a time to wake up their sleeping babies and let them partake of communion. As part of Christ's body, these babies, along with all of us, are nourished by Christ's presence in the sacraments. When people are baptized and receive Holy Eucharist in the same service, it shows the indissoluble connection between these two great sacraments.

Baptism is how we get into the family of Christ. The sacred meal, Holy Eucharist, is what we as a family do together.

For Reflection

- Read Matthew 3:13-17, and then think about our current practice of baptism. What is similar between Jesus' baptism and those in our day? What is different?

- Some people are baptized as infants and others as adults. What are some of the gifts of each of these experiences of Holy Baptism?

- Thinking about your life and actions, what does it mean to renounce Satan and evil powers and sinful desires? What does it mean to turn to Jesus Christ and put your whole trust in his grace?

- Which of the baptismal promises is most difficult for you to live out in your practice of the Christian faith?

- What's your favorite moment in the baptismal liturgy and why?

Chapter 4

A Wonderful Sacrament

Eucharistic Beliefs

God our Father, whose Son our Lord Jesus Christ in a wonderful Sacrament has left us a memorial of his passion: Grant us so to venerate the sacred mysteries of his Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of his redemption; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 252

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament that Episcopalians experience most often. In nearly all congregations, Holy Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday. But do we know what we are doing? Is it possible we take this "routine" sacrament for granted? Author Annie Dillard once suggested that we should wear crash helmets when we celebrate the Holy Eucharist because the power we are unleashing in the sacrament is so great. Since we don't always take the eucharist seriously, Dillard provocatively wonders if there's a chance God will smite us one day for neglecting our worship and its power.

The word eucharist comes from a Greek word that means thanksgiving. In this sacrament, we give thanks to God, offering to God our gifts from what God has given us. The centerpiece of the eucharistic service is called the Great Thanksgiving.

I don't think God is going to smite us, and I don't think it's necessary to wear crash helmets. Still, Dillard's point is well taken. In the Holy Eucharist, we are summoning the presence of the Word made flesh among us, the Christ who was present at the moment of creation. We Episcopalians believe that Jesus Christ becomes truly present in the bread and wine. That is nothing to yawn through or mutter by rote.

In the Beginning

As we contemplate this power and this mystery, let's step back and start at the beginning. Along with Holy Baptism, Holy Eucharist is one of the two great sacraments instituted by Jesus himself. The story of the first eucharist—the last meal Jesus ate with his friends, the disciples—is pretty familiar to most. We can find it in all four gospels; here is the version from Matthew.

> While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it,

> gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

From the earliest days of the church, this sacred ritual was the centerpiece of Christian gatherings. As early as two decades after Jesus' death and resurrection, Saint Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Saint Paul wanted the followers of Jesus in Corinth to honor this holy meal. He was concerned that those first Christians wouldn't honor Jesus as they gathered.

> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an

> unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

There was danger that they would be too casual—that they would not discern Christ's presence or that some would eat before others, creating a hierarchy at precisely the moment when Jesus is calling all into mutual obedience in community. But that's not all. Saint Paul warns people to eat before they come to the celebration. You see: This isn't an ordinary meal at all. We don't gather to eat bread that sustains our earthly bodies but rather to eat the bread from heaven that sustains our souls.

Saint Paul and Annie Dillard are right to remind us to be mindful of the (literally) awesome power of what we're doing. But at the same time, we shouldn't act as if we must understand everything about it—that we must have a degree in eucharistic theology—before we can fully partake and receive the sacrament.

Several years ago, a new family showed up at the church I was serving, and they were worried that their children "might not be ready" for Holy Communion. When I asked about this, they said that the kids might not understand what we're doing. I

hastily responded that, even as a priest with several theology degrees, I didn't claim to understand this profound mystery. Further, the presence of shelves and shelves of books on the eucharist (and more to be written still) is evidence that we might not have it totally figured out. Approaching the sacrament with childlike wonder might be the best model for all of us.

Another time, I was preparing a whole family for baptism, including some young school-aged children. The children had been coming to church for months with their parents. Because they weren't baptized yet, they had been receiving a blessing at the altar rail instead of the consecrated bread and wine. As the date of baptism drew closer, I asked one of the children if he was ready to receive Holy Communion. "Yes!" came the enthusiastic reply. Then I asked him if he knew what to expect when he received the bread and wine for the first time. "It's Jesus!" Perhaps we as adults overthink the eucharist; some children understand it in profound and clear ways—and can teach us a thing or two.

The Presence of Christ

As Episcopalians, we believe that Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the bread and wine as they are blessed and shared by the priest and people. In the eucharist,

we offer to God "our selves, our souls and bodies" (336). And in the eucharist, God blesses us with the presence of Christ himself, both in the sacred elements and in the gathered community.

Over the years, Christians have disagreed mightily on exactly how Christ is present in the liturgy. From these varying ideas have come different practices in how Christians celebrate the eucharist. Some Christians believe that the bread and the wine are mere symbols, and that eucharist is but a recollection of the Last Supper. Some Christians believe that the substance of the bread becomes the Body of Christ, literally, and that it only continues to appear as bread. Anglicans have not been keen to adopt dogmatic positions, simply saying that the consecrated bread is the Body of Christ and leaving it at that—although it's not hard to find Anglicans with various positions on this issue.

One way to understand what we're doing is to think about some of the names people use for this sacrament. The Catechism in our prayer book says this: "The Holy Eucharist is called the Lord's Supper, and Holy Communion; it is also known as the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, and the Great Offering" (859).

The Catechism is a summary of the Episcopal Church's teaching on key topics.

Found on pages 844-862 of *The Book of Common Prayer*, the Catechism is presented in question-and-answer format so that it is easy to explore and reference. The answers in the Catechism are meant to be a starting point for deeper reflection and teaching. The responses in the Catechism offer beautiful, succinct summaries of Episcopal teaching, with answers deeply grounded both in the Bible and in the precise words of *The Book of Common Prayer.*

- **Eucharist** comes from a Greek word that means thanksgiving because the entire meal is our offering of thanks to God for the many blessings we receive and because, in Holy Communion, we receive Christ himself and we are grateful.

- **The Lord's Supper** reminds us that our gathering is a remembrance of Christ's last meal with his friends, the night he shared one last meal with his disciples.

- **Holy Communion** emphasizes how we relate to God as he dwells in us and we in him. The sacrament also helps us discover that the many members of Christ's body are made one—as we gather, we commune with one another as well as with God.

- **Divine Liturgy** is a name one might expect to find in an Eastern Orthodox tradition, but we Anglicans use it as well. Divine means that what we are doing is a

heavenly thing, not an earthly thing. We are, as Saint Paul says, setting our minds on things above. The Divine Liturgy reminds us that we do not gather to deny the pain or needs of the world but rather to offer our prayers and our lives for the deepest needs of the world and all people.

- **Mass** is a way of describing Holy Eucharist that some Episcopalians might expect to find in use primarily among Roman Catholics. However, Mass is one of the ways our prayer book suggests we might refer to eucharist, and it is a good reference word. Mass comes from the same Latin word as mission, meaning to send. The word Mass came into being because of the importance of the dismissal —the sending forth—at the conclusion of the service. When we call our service the Mass, we are reminding ourselves of the importance of going out into the world to do the work we have been given to do.

- **The Great Offering** is rarely used but is also an important and valid description of this sacrament. In ancient Jewish worship—which Jesus knew and practiced —the pattern was daily prayer and weekly sacrifice. In the temple, burnt offerings were made each week to God, both to give an offering of thanks and to make recompense for sin, among other things. Christians adopted this weekly pattern, and today we keep the discipline of daily prayer and a weekly sacrifice.

However, ours is a different kind of sacrifice of praise. Our prayer book says this beautifully: "And we earnestly desire thy fatherly goodness to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, whereby we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies" (342). In other words, in the act of expressing our profound gratitude to God for all our blessings, we offer back to God our very selves, as well as the visible gifts of money, bread, and wine.

In fulfilling Christ's command to remember him in blessing bread and wine, we experience his presence and are nourished to do his work. This prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer* encapsulates nicely what we're doing during Holy Eucharist.

Almighty and everliving God,
we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food
of the most precious Body and Blood
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ;
and for assuring us in these holy mysteries
that we are living members of the Body of your Son,
and heirs of your eternal kingdom.
And now, Father, send us out
to do the work you have given us to do,
to love and serve you
as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.
To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,

be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.* (366)

In our celebrations of the eucharist, we are fed by word and sacrament—the scriptures are read, and we feast on Christ's presence in bread and wine. In this act, we see Jesus Christ, but the gathered community is also reminded that we are the Body of Christ. As Saint Augustine famously wrote about Christians who eat the bread and drink the wine: "Be what you see; receive what you are." We see Jesus Christ, and we receive his body, because the church—the gathered community—is the Body of Christ.

For Reflection

- Our prayer book gives six names for Holy Eucharist, reminding us it "is called the Lord's Supper, and Holy Communion; it is also known as the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, and the Great Offering." What does each name tell us about what is happening? Do these names make a new connection to the eucharist for you?

- The author makes the claim that infants and children should receive communion, even if they don't understand it well. Do you agree with this claim? Why or why not?

- We believe that in the Holy Eucharist, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus. What are some of the liturgical practices in your church that help point you to this mystical reality?

- If your next-door neighbor called over to you on a Sunday morning as you were getting ready to leave and said, "I'm curious why you go to church to receive Holy Communion every week," how would you respond?

Chapter 5

Be Known to Us in the Breaking of Bread

Eucharistic Practices

Be present, be present, O Jesus, our great High Priest, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of bread; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 834

A few years ago, I was in Tanzania on Ash Wednesday. Throughout the day, I was busy with work. When evening came, I wanted to attend an Ash Wednesday service, so I headed to the Anglican cathedral in Dar es Salaam.

I was warmly welcomed and found a seat in the packed church. The opening hymn wasn't in my language, but I sang along, trying my best to pronounce the words sung to a familiar tune. Even though the entire service was in Swahili, I was able to follow along, from the opening prayers, readings, sermon, prayers, blessing, administration of ashes, and offering to the Holy Eucharist and final prayers. Not a single word was

intelligible to me, but I knew what was happening at every moment.

Despite being in a strange city and hearing the service in a strange tongue, I felt very much at home. This is because the service was structured like all of the Ash Wednesday services I have ever attended. The vestments, the furnishings, the music, and the ritual movements were familiar.

Over the years, I have attended Anglican services of Holy Eucharist on six continents and in many languages, and I've always been grateful for the gift of our common prayer, of a shared experience that transcends time, race, location, and culture. While plenty of differences exist among these places, the commonality is deeper. Anglican Christians, along with many other Christians, see a great gift in using prayers that reflect our global and ancient church. Our prayers are rooted not just in our own preferences but also in the wider church. Thus, when we pray, we are taking part in a tradition that is bigger than ourselves. Our prayers are united with those of Christians through time and space.

In addition to the words and prayers, music is another place of common ground and a central part of our Christian worship. The prayer book allows any part of the service to be said or sung, and it is common to add hymns or songs to the service and to sing certain parts of the liturgy. Though the style of music or instruments may vary greatly

—guitar, drums, pipe organ, trumpets, folk music, English cathedral music, Gregorian chant—there is a venerable history of music being used to adorn and enrich our prayers.

We will look at some of the common elements that are almost always included in celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. Details may vary, but the shape and contour of the service will generally match what you see here.

You might like to follow along in *The Book of Common Prayer*, starting at page 323 for Rite I ("thee" and "thou" language) or page 355 (more contemporary language).

Postures for Prayer and Worship

Traditionally in the Episcopal Church, we use one of three main postures for worship. We sit for instruction, we kneel for prayer, and we stand for praise. These days, kneeling is becoming somewhat less common, but the rule still holds. In places where kneeling has passed out of favor, standing, which is also a traditional and ancient posture of prayer, is substituted. These different postures are ways of using our whole bodies in our prayers. Service leaflets often give guidance about local customs, but when in doubt, just watch what others do.

It is pretty common for people to sign themselves with a cross. To make the sign of the cross, people move their hand from their forehead, to their lower chest, to the left shoulder, to the right shoulder, and usually back to the center of the chest. Some people use four fingers extended, while others prefer to join their first two fingers and thumb as a reminder of the Holy Trinity. It is common to cross one's self during mentions of the Holy Trinity and when the priest pronounces absolution or forgiveness. In some congregations, there will be many more occasions of crossing. When in doubt, watch others, and it's never wrong to ask the priest or someone else why they are crossing themselves at particular moments.

In some congregations, people use additional postures or gestures. Genuflecting—touching the right knee to the ground—is a devotional gesture to acknowledge Christ's presence, used when people enter or exit the church and at other times. Note that this is quite different from a curtsy in that a genuflection lowers the knee until it touches the ground briefly. People may make a simple bow, inclining the head, at the mention of Jesus' name or when the Holy Trinity is invoked. Some people will use a profound bow—lowering the upper half of one's body to about a 45-degree angle or more from the ground

—during the singing of the *Sanctus* ("Holy, holy, holy") in the eucharistic prayer or in place of a genuflection.

Gather in the Lord's Name

The first part of the service is the gathering. The people of God assemble for prayer and praise. The gathering itself can be seen as a symbol of the eucharist. Just as many grains are kneaded together into one loaf of bread, so too are many individuals knit together into the one Body of Christ.

As people enter the church, many will pray after they settle into chairs or pews so that they can prepare their hearts and minds for worship. Our prayer book has a really good prayer for this purpose.

> O Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and of supplication: Deliver us, when we draw near to you, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (833)

As the prayer says, our purpose in gathering is to worship God, not to see friends. That's what coffee hour is for! The worship service

itself is meant for us to focus our whole being on worshiping God.

The service usually begins with some kind of procession. Perhaps a cross will lead the ministers into the church, signifying how we all follow the banner of Christ. Processions might also include torchbearers (acolytes), choir, altar servers, a gospel book-bearer, or assisting clergy. Once the priest and the other assisting ministers are in place, the service begins with a response between priest and people that varies by season. For example, the priest may say "Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," and the people respond, "And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen." During Eastertide, this will instead be "Alleluia. Christ is risen," with a response of "The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia." And during seasons such as Lent or Advent, the priest will say "Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins," and the response is "His mercy endures for ever." There are other possibilities in some of the supplemental liturgical books, also authorized for use in the Episcopal Church.

The priest may then offer this ancient prayer.

> Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy

Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (355)

This lovely prayer with its themes of cleansing is called the Collect for Purity. The idea is that we rely on God's power in the Holy Spirit to help us make ourselves ready for worship and to be aware of the importance of what we are doing.

Next comes one of several very old Christian worship songs. While the congregation might speak these words, they are certainly hymns. During seasons or occasions when we focus on our sinfulness and our need of God, we might say the "Lord, have mercy" or *Kyrie eleison.*

The words *Kyrie eleison* are Greek. This hymn was introduced into Christian worship when many Christians spoke Greek. Ever since, it has been customary for worshipers to sing these words in Greek or in their own language. "Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy." It is a simple yet stirring plea.

Other times, especially when we focus on celebration, we might sing "Glory to God in the highest" or *Gloria in excelsis Deo.* Many parts of the service have Latin names, because when they were introduced, Christians were speaking Latin. It's perfectly fine to use the names from our own language! In any case, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*

is inspired by the Gospel of Luke when the angels sang at Christ's birth.

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. *Amen.* (356)

This hymn of praise is meant to join our voices with the angelic witnesses and to enlist our voices in praising the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we might sing the *Trisagion*, or thrice-holy hymn. This hymn is at least

1,500 years old. Much like the *Kyrie eleison*, this hymn is about imploring God's mercy.

> Holy God, Holy and Mighty,
> Holy Immortal One,
> Have mercy upon us. (356)

The exact details of origin for these three hymns are not as important as the fact that in our regular Sunday worship today, we are praying as people have prayed for centuries or even millennia.

Next the leader greets the people. "The Lord be with you." This comes from the book of Ruth (2:4) when a man named Boaz greets people with these words. Our response is always "And also with you" or "And with thy spirit" depending on whether we are praying with contemporary (Rite II) or more traditional (Rite I) prayers.

Then the leader may pause, leaving a moment of quiet for people to offer silent prayers. Then the Collect of the Day is said. A different collect is appointed for each day or occasion being celebrated. Here's an example from the first Sunday after Christmas Day.

Collect is a funny word. In church, when we say it, the emphasis is on the first syllable (COLL-ect). This is a special kind of prayer in which the leader brings together (collects) the individual prayers of the gathered community.

> Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (213)

This prayer gathers the themes of the readings and points us toward our celebration of Christ's incarnation and how it can bear fruit in our lives. The Collect of the Day, as it raises up themes for our celebration, concludes the portion of the liturgy in which we are gathering. Next come the scripture readings.

The Word of God

When Jesus' followers gathered for Holy Eucharist, they heard scripture read and someone responded by offering teaching. In Jesus' time, a scroll was read, and the reader would simply pick up where the last gathering left off. In our time, a lectionary (a fancy word for a list of readings) tells us which passages of scripture to read.

Normally, we will hear readings from the Old Testament, from the letters of the New Testament, and from the gospels. In addition, we sing or say a psalm or a portion of a psalm. Sometimes there is just one reading plus a gospel, but there is

always, without exception, a reading from the gospels, time to hear directly from Jesus and his followers. Our lectionary appoints readings for a three-year cycle. If you come to church every Sunday for three years, you will encounter nearly all of the New Testament and a good amount of the Old Testament. (Some of the most challenging and interesting parts of the scripture are omitted, so there's no substitute for picking up a Bible and reading it yourself, if you want the full story!) You can find the lectionary starting on page 887 of the prayer book.

The scriptures are typically read from a lectern, or reading stand. Our task is to listen carefully, and then when the reader finishes with "The Word of the Lord", or a similar phrase, to respond in gratitude for the scriptures, "Thanks be to God."

Many churches have a special procession for the gospel reading, bringing the book into the midst of the people accompanied by torches and perhaps even incense. By moving into the center of the congregation, the procession symbolizes the way in which the gospel—the Good News of God in Jesus Christ—came into our world and continues to do so. The gospel is read by a deacon when one is present, or otherwise by a priest.

After the readings, our prayer book requires a response to the scriptures in a sermon. The preacher comments on the readings and helps us make connections with our own

lives. Sermons are not just Bible studies in which we scrutinize the scriptures with critical eyes, though the sermons may take us deeply into scripture. Sermons are not merely essays on what is happening in the world, though no good preacher will ignore the world outside the church. Rather sermons are meant to draw us into the sweeping narrative of God's love found in the scriptures and to help us find our place in that grand story.

Following the sermon, we say a creed. This will almost always be the Nicene Creed, a summary of the Christian faith that is more than 1,600 years old. By reciting these words together, we place ourselves in a beautiful and slowly moving river of Christian theological tradition. Regardless of the issues we face in our lives and in our world, the church throughout all time and all places proclaims the same ancient faith rooted in the saving work of God the Father (in creation), of God the Son (in our redemption), and in God the Holy Spirit (in sustaining us). Chapter 13 explores the creeds in more detail.

Pray for the World and the Church

From ancient times, it has been customary for gathered Christians to pray for their own

needs and the needs of the world. So it is that when we gather for Holy Eucharist, we too pray for not only those things that are important to our local community or to ourselves but also for the whole world. *The Book of Common Prayer* specifies a list of concerns for which we invariably pray:

> The Universal Church, its members, and its mission
> The Nation and all in authority
> The welfare of the world
> The concerns of the local community
> Those who suffer and those in any trouble
> The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate) (383)

We may pray using one of the forms in the prayer book, or perhaps a member of the church will have written prayers. But whatever words we use, we pray for the church and the world. If you would like to read the six suggested forms for the Prayers of the People, they can be found on pages 383-395 of the prayer book. The Prayers of the People may be led by a lay person or a deacon, one of the few moments in our liturgy where the priest participates rather than leading.

We also pray for God's forgiveness of our own sins. After we ask for forgiveness and pray for change in our lives, the priest will pronounce God's forgiveness. This kind of confession is often called the general confession, as it

is said by all people, covering all our sins. Some people will want to avail themselves of what is sometimes called private confession —where one confesses privately to a priest— outside of the liturgy. See Chapter 7 to learn more.

Exchange the Peace

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus teaches about the importance of reconciliation prior to making our offerings to God. He says, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (5:23-24). Because of this teaching, the church began the custom of passing the Peace of Christ before we make our offerings to God and receive the Holy Eucharist. The priest announces, "The peace of the Lord be always with you." We respond in words— often people will say, "And also with you." Then we respond by action, sharing a sign of Christ's peace. In our day, this is usually a handshake, but the ancient practice was a chaste kiss on the cheek. A hug is also a traditional and venerable way to pass the peace; many who pass the peace with a hug gently grip the arms of the other person near the shoulder. This preserves the symbol of a sign of peace while avoiding bodily

contact that could make some people feel uncomfortable.

Too often, the passing of the peace becomes a conversational free-for-all in which friends catch up on weekend news. There is spiritual danger in this practice, because we neglect the opportunity for reconciliation at our own peril. When we pass the peace, we should make a special point first to share peace with those from whom we are estranged. A second priority is strangers or guests. Only then should we greet friends, because we have no need for reconciliation with them. In other words, the Passing of the Peace is for reconciliation, not for catching up with our buddies.

It is poignant to see a first-time guest in a congregation standing awkwardly while people who know each other well chat at this moment in the liturgy. At precisely the moment when all should be reconciled, we divide into insiders and outsiders and neglect our guests. In our world of estrangement and division, we need every bit of practice at reconciliation and unity we can muster.

Prepare the Table

After the peace, an offering is collected. It is common for this to be an offering of money only, whether cash or checks. In some places

in the world, the offering also might consist of food or other gifts. Whatever is collected from the people, all our gifts—including our gifts of bread and wine for Holy Eucharist—are presented and placed on the altar. In this action, we also offer our very selves to God, trusting that God will transform our lives so that we might live according to God's purposes for us.

If there is a deacon in a congregation, the deacon will set and prepare the table. The bread and the wine are carefully placed and prepared for their consecration in the eucharistic prayer to follow.

Make Eucharist

The priest and other ministers gather at the altar. The celebrant (the priest who says the prayer of consecration) leads the gathered community in the eucharistic prayer. In the Episcopal Church, we may choose from nine authorized prayers: two traditional language prayers (Prayer I on page 333, Prayer II on page 340), four modern-language prayers (Prayer A on page 361, Prayer B on page 367, Prayer C on page 369, Prayer D on page 372), and three experimental prayers that make use of expansive language for people (avoiding many male pronouns, for example); these are found in a book called *Enriching Our Worship 1* (Church

Publishing,1997). All nine of these prayers have some common elements:

- The prayers may be sung or said.
- The priest begins with a traditional set of greetings and responses, for example, "Lift up your hearts." "We lift them to the Lord."
- The prayers unite our voices with saints and angels of all time and all space.
- The prayer includes Jesus' words of institution to bless the bread and the wine. These words come directly from the scriptures.
- The prayers include an invocation for the Holy Spirit to descend upon our gifts and upon the gathered community.
- The prayers end with an AMEN. It is in all capital letters, the only word so indicated in *The Book of Common Prayer.* The people are meant to boldly say Amen to conclude the prayer—it is our way of saying "let it be so" to the words that have come before.

After the eucharistic prayer, the congregation joins in saying the Lord's Prayer ("Our Father, who art in heaven...").

The Lord's Prayer

According to the prayer book, the Lord's Prayer is always said at every public service

of the church. In saying this prayer, we are not merely repeating a prayer by rote, but we are praying as Christ taught us—for the things he taught us to pray for.

The prayer book offers two versions of the Lord's Prayer: traditional and contemporary. Both are fully acceptable options.

Traditional

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Contemporary

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Break the Bread

Immediately after the Lord's Prayer, the priest breaks the consecrated bread. At this

point, the bread has become the Body of Christ, and so this breaking of Christ's body reminds us poignantly of the sacrifice Jesus made for us in his death. Some churches use leavened or unleavened baked bread. Others use wafers that are compressed bread pieces. These wafers don't look much like bread, but they are made of wheat flour. The wafers are often used for convenience, since "real" bread can leave crumbs. In any case, the priest will break the loaf or a larger wafer. The priest's wafer is not larger because the priest is more important, but rather it is bigger so that the whole gathered community can see the action of breaking. After the bread is broken, silence will be kept. This is one of the only places where *The Book of Common Prayer* orders silence. We might constructively use this time for spiritual preparation to receive eucharist, perhaps repeating the words of Saint Thomas when he realized he was seeing Jesus Christ himself, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Share the Gifts of God

The priest and the minsters at the altar receive communion as the people begin to come forward. Everyone in the congregation is invited to come to the table. Those who do not receive Holy Communion are given a blessing by the priest. In the Episcopal Church, all baptized Christians are invited to receive bread and wine, regardless of age or

denomination. Baptized infants may receive Holy Communion with a tiny drop of wine. The fullness of Christ's presence is found in either the bread or the wine, so one can receive either or both. In the Episcopal Church, opportunity is always given to people to both eat the bread and drink from the chalice. If someone is not baptized, she or he may still approach the altar, where the priest will offer God's blessing. Those who are unable to move from their place because of a mobility issue can usually make this known to an usher, who will direct the priest and an assistant to bring Holy Communion to the worshiper.

After communion has been administered to all who will receive, the priest or the deacon clean the vessels and clear the table. Any leftover bread or wine is reverently consumed immediately or set aside to be consumed after the service. Because we believe that the bread and the wine have been consecrated and are now the Body and Blood of Christ, we treat them with utmost care; they are never discarded. Wine is consumed or poured onto the ground, and bread is consumed. Sometimes bread or wine are kept in the church, in case a sick person is in urgent need to receive Holy Eucharist during the week. The place where the blessed bread and wine are kept or reserved is called an aumbry or tabernacle. It is usually a small metal or wooden box that is kept locked. A candle—a symbol of Christ's presence—

burns whenever the aumbry or tabernacle contains the body or blood of Christ.

Once the bread and wine have been consumed or cleared away, the people join together in a post-communion prayer of thanksgiving and hope for God's continued work in our lives. Then the priest pronounces a blessing on the people—or, during Lent, says a prayer over the people.

Lastly, the deacon or the priest sends the people out with the dismissal. This is a very important part of the service, because the dismissal sends us into the world to carry out the work that has been made possible by the sustenance we have received in Holy Eucharist. Our response to the dismissal is "Thanks be to God." In these words—the last words of the service—we give thanks for not only the worship we have experienced but for Christ's abiding presence in our lives as we go forth into the world to do the work he has given us.

Regardless of form or style in the eucharistic service, Jesus Christ is made known to us in the breaking of the bread. In worshiping as Christians have worshiped for hundreds of years, we too hear God's word in scripture; we too offer our prayers for our community and our world; we too offer our gifts to God; we too are nourished by Jesus Christ's Body and Blood; and we too know the transformation of God's saving grace at work in our lives. Thanks be to God, indeed.

For Reflection

- Have you ever attended Holy Eucharist in a different country or in a different church tradition? If so, how did that experience compare with worship in your church? What was the same and what was different?

- What is your favorite moment in the eucharistic liturgy and why?

- Christians often talk about the importance of word and sacrament in our worship. Our liturgy includes lots of scripture and a sermon. How can you put your encounter with God's word to work in your life?

- What are some of the liturgical connections between gathering on Sunday to be nourished by Christ in the sacraments and the experience of doing God's work in the world throughout the week?

Chapter 6

Grow in Grace Through the Years

Confirmation and Marriage

Holy Spirit, open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts, that we may grow closer to you through joy and through suffering. Be with us in the fullness of your power as new members are added to your household, as we grow in grace through the years, when we are joined in marriage, when we turn to you in sickness or special need, and, at the last, when we are committed into the Father's hands.

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 569

If you go into any Episcopal Church and check the prayer books in the pew, you'll usually find a well-worn section of pages starting around page 300. This section contains the "main" services of the church —Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist. These are the two sacraments of the church that are for *all* people, and so we use them most frequently when we gather for worship. But *The Book of Common Prayer* includes many important liturgies and prayers that make up our common life.

The section following Holy Eucharist is called "Pastoral Offices" and includes many of the sacramental rites instituted by the church through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These sacramental rites include rites of passage, like confirmation and marriage, as well as liturgies for the sick and dying. The rites encompass times of great joy as well as those of pain and grief, a reminder that God in Christ wants to walk with us through all the moments of our lives—the beginning and the end, the highs and the lows, the everyday and the once-in-a-lifetime. Although these liturgies are less frequently used than the services for Holy Eucharist or Holy Baptism, they are no less important. They are a means of grace, connecting us to God and to one another in the midst of some of the defining moments of our lives.

The Rite of Confirmation

As we explored in earlier chapters, Holy Baptism is the great sacrament of Christian initiation; in the waters of baptism we are made Christ's own and become full members of his body, the church. But baptism is not, of course, the end of the life of faith. It is the entry into Christ's body, the beginning of life in the church, a first step on the journey. At baptism, the church both celebrates our entry into the Body of Christ and looks forward to the moment when, as more mature Christians, we will stand

before Christ and the church and affirm for ourselves those commitments we made or that were made for us at our baptism.

Confirmation is our chance to "express a mature commitment to Christ, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop." (860). Those baptized as adults have already made a deliberate decision to commit to Christ, so confirmation is a reaffirmation of faith and a commitment to the Episcopal Church. Those baptized as infants had parents and godparents who made big, important vows and promises on their behalf. As teenagers or adults, they are given the opportunity to decide if they want to make those big, important vows and promises to God for themselves. In baptism God welcomes us into the family of faith, and our parents and godparents promise to instruct us in what it looks like to take part in that family. In confirmation, we take the baton of our faith formation for ourselves, both accepting the gift of grace from God and vowing to try, with God's help, to live into those promises, taking our place in the Body of Christ.

Confirmation, a mature affirmation of faith, is accompanied by the laying on of hands by a bishop. As you may recall from Chapter 3, bishops in the early church performed all baptisms. As the church grew, this became logistically impossible, and priests were given the authority to

harken back to the promises of their baptism: "Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil?...Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?" The congregation is then asked the same question that is posed in the baptismal service: "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" (416). The congregation answers, "We will," a reminder that Christian community is an important part of the life of faith, not only for infants being baptized but also for all people of all ages!

The service continues with the congregation renewing their own baptismal promises. The prayers for the candidates are the same as those used at baptism. Again, this grounds the service of confirmation in baptism. We are reminded of the commitments that were made on our behalf by others, and we are reaffirming those promises for ourselves.

Next comes the laying on of hands by the bishop. The bishop places his or her hands on each person being confirmed and says a prayer for each one, invoking the Holy Spirit and asking God to strengthen and sustain the person being confirmed.

Reception and Reaffirmation

Anyone who has made a mature commitment of faith in another Christian

fellowship (such as adult baptism or confirmation in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or many Lutheran churches) is considered to be both baptized and confirmed by the Episcopal Church, so long as they were confirmed by a bishop of their church. People in that situation who wish to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism in the presence of an Episcopal bishop can choose to be received into the Episcopal Church. In this event, the bishop lays hands on each candidate for reception and says, "We recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion" (418).

Occasionally, someone who is already confirmed or received experiences a deeper conversion to Christ and wishes to reaffirm his or her baptismal promises. This might be for a person returning to the church after a period of absence or unbelief or for someone who has had a particularly transformative spiritual experience that he or she wishes to express in the context of worship with the community. In this situation, the bishop lays hands on the person and says the prayer for reaffirmation: "*N.*, may the Holy Spirit, who has begun a good work in you, direct and uphold you in the service of Christ and his kingdom. *Amen*" (419).

After the bishop has laid hands on each person being confirmed, received, and

reaffirmed, the bishop says a concluding prayer over all the candidates. The service then continues with the Peace and Holy Eucharist.

Confirmation: Why? (or Why Not?)

Nearly every priest or parent has heard the question at least once: "Do I *have* to be confirmed?" The question is sometimes posed by a teenager facing his or her parent's expectations, sometimes by a new member checking out what membership in the church means, or sometimes by a couple seeking to be married in an Episcopal Church. The short answer is no...and yes.

The Book of Common Prayer says that confirmation is "expected" rather than required. The canons (the laws governing the church) require confirmation for a few individuals: those being ordained, deputies to General Convention, and those appointed to many church-wide offices. But confirmation is not "required" for most Episcopalians. In the Episcopal Church, you don't have to be confirmed in order to be married (although at least one member of the couple must be baptized), to be buried, or to receive communion.

For most people, confirmation is not required in order to be a member of the Episcopal Church. But confirmation is expected, because it is something that mature Christians can and should *want* to do. Much as with marriage, couples who love one another *want* to stand up and make vows and promises in front of family and friends, so too a Christian, loving God very much, ought to *want* to stand up and make vows and promises to God in front of family and friends. Confirmation is one way that we, as mature Christians, commit to a life of faith. It doesn't mean that we have everything figured out, or that we will fulfill those vows and promises perfectly, any more than a couple seeking marriage has their relationship all figured out or will fulfill their vows and promises perfectly. But confirmation means that we are promising to try, to strive, to commit to God, who has, in our baptism, committed to us.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

A wedding is a celebration of great joy, and the marriage service is filled with beautiful words and turns of phrase. But in the Episcopal Church, a wedding is much more than a party, a photo opportunity, or even a celebration. Marriage is "a solemn and public covenant...in the presence of God" (422), and

it is a sacramental rite, an outward and visible sign of God's inward, spiritual grace.

So what does that mean, and what does that look like in the Episcopal Church? There are a few things we can learn from this description. Civil government sees marriage as a legal contract—an agreement made between two parties. A civil marriage is really about and between the two people being married. And in the Episcopal Church, all marriages must conform to the laws of the state in regard to that contract. But Christian marriage is not merely a contract; it is also a covenant: a sacred promise that involves not only the two people being married but also God and the gathered community, a union that both echoes and reflects the union between Christ and the church.

We see this in the iconic opening words of the marriage service: "Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony" (423). These words, repeated often in movies, books, and TV shows, say a great deal about how the church understands the sacramental rite of marriage. The service begins not by naming the two people getting married but by naming the gathered community, "dearly beloved." The opening line also reminds us that we gather "in the presence of God." The opening address continues with the role that

marriage has played through the history of God's covenant with humanity, articulating that marriage exists for "mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord" (423).

Next, the celebrant asks whether there is any reason why the couple may not be lawfully married. This is a moment to reflect on the seriousness of marriage and also a reminder that this marriage is a legal contract as well as a spiritual covenant. Then the service continues with the declaration of consent. Both parties declare their consent, and then the congregation makes their promise to uphold the couple in their marriage, underscoring that the community is not merely there to witness the service but to help the couple in the days and weeks and years to come uphold those vows.

According to the canons of the Episcopal Church, all those seeking marriage in the Episcopal Church must sign the following Declaration of Intention: "We understand the teaching of the church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture

in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community."

This declaration is a beautiful summation of what the Episcopal Church believes marriage is for, and what the characteristics of a Christian marriage should be. By signing this declaration, every couple acknowledges the gift and the duty of these promises and commits to seek the help of God and the support of the community in fulfilling them.

Vows and Blessing

After the optional presentation (where a parent or loved one presents one or both members of the couple), the collect, readings, and a homily, the service continues with the vows. The couple take one another's right hand and promise "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow" (427). The couple may exchange rings or other symbols as an outward sign and reminder of their vows. The priest blesses the rings (or other symbols) before they are exchanged and then pronounces the couple husband and wife.

The service immediately moves into the prayers, either continuing with the Lord's Prayer, if there is no communion, or the prayers found on page 429. These lovely prayers are offered not only for the couple being married but also for those witnessing the vows and even the wider community.

Then the couple kneel, and the priest blesses their marriage. After the blessing, everyone stands and the priest offers the peace. The newly married couple greet each other (sometimes with a kiss), and then people throughout the congregation exchange the peace.

If the service does not include communion, the wedding party leaves the church at this time; otherwise, the service continues with Holy Eucharist. At the offertory, the newly married couple may present the offerings of bread and wine, a lovely way for them to offer thanksgiving for the blessings of this day and symbolically share their abundance with all of those gathered. The newly married couple receive communion first, after which all baptized Christians are welcome to receive.

Marriage in the Episcopal Church

Over the past decades, a conversation has been happening across the United States and throughout the Episcopal Church about the meaning and definition of marriage—particularly when it comes to

same-sex couples. On June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples had the equal right to civil marriage throughout the United States. On July 1, 2015 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed two resolutions. One was a change to Canon 18: Of Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, that removed all gendered language in reference to marriage, which opened the door for same-sex marriage. A second resolution authorized for trial use two liturgies for same-sex marriage. Trial use means that these liturgies can officially be used in congregations while they are being considered for future inclusion in *The Book of Common Prayer.*

General Convention passed these resolutions by an overwhelming majority, proclaiming the Episcopal Church as a welcoming and affirming place for all people, regardless of sexual orientation, and opening the sacramental rite of marriage to same-sex couples. The resolutions passed by General Convention are clear that the normative teaching of the church is that same-sex marriage is legal and covenantal. At the same time, the decision was not unanimous, and some Episcopalians do not support same-sex marriage. To accommodate the wide and deeply held views on this issue, the Episcopal Church made provisions for

those who disagree with offering the rite of marriage to same-sex couples.

Currently, *The Book of Common Prayer's* liturgy still includes gendered references and refers to marriage as "between a man and a woman." For the moment, the Episcopal Church has two distinct sets of liturgies: the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in *The Book of Common Prayer* and the liturgies that are authorized for trial use. This is, in part, because it takes two successive General Conventions (a total of six years) to change text in *The Book of Common Prayer.* It is likely that process will begin soon, but it has not happened yet.

For the purposes of our discussion of the rite of marriage, we use the liturgy in *The Book of Common Prayer.* But it is important to note that one of the liturgies for same-sex marriage is very similar to the one in the prayer book, with pronouns and gendered references changed or removed. Any discussion in this book of Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage would apply equally to that trial option.

After a post-communion prayer, a blessing, and a dismissal, the couple, the wedding party, and the attendees leave the church, often accompanied by joyful music. The wedding service has ended, and the marriage is begun.

This is an important part of the Episcopal Church's understanding of marriage. The sacrament of marriage does not take place at a wedding, it begins at a wedding. The sacrament of marriage is enacted in the ongoing relationship—when a couple wrong one another, and then forgive; when a couple choose to take in a stranger and offer hospitality; when a couple show forth God's love by loving one another "for better for worse."

The service is just the beginning; the sacrament will be lived out in ways large and small in the coming days and months and years. It is an important beginning, because the prayers and promises should shape the reality of the relationship that is to come. It is a powerful beginning, because we believe that marriage is a sacramental rite, a rite in which the couple "receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows" (861). But it is only a beginning, a first step into a sacrament that lasts a lifetime.

For Reflection

- If you have been confirmed: How did you prepare for your confirmation? What was it like? What impact does being confirmed have on your life?

- Some priests require all confirmands to make an appointment with them prior to confirmation to explain why they want to be confirmed. What are some reasons a person might want to be confirmed? Why might a person not wish to be confirmed?

- *The Book of Common Prayer* says that the purpose of marriage is: "mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord." How is this similar to or different from what culture portrays as the purpose for marriage?

- The wedding ceremony is only the beginning of the sacrament of marriage, which lasts a lifetime. In a marriage between two people, what are the "outward and visible signs," and what are the "inward and spiritual graces"?

Chapter 7

Both in Mind and Body

Confession and Healing

Almighty and merciful God, in your goodness keep us, we pray, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready both in mind and body, may accomplish with free hearts those things which belong to your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 228-229

Throughout the gospel narratives, Jesus heals those he encounters. His healing addresses more than bodily health: Jesus forgives sin, healing the soul. Jesus heals emotional distress. Jesus heals relationships and communities, bringing people back into reconciled life with one another and with God. Jesus' life and ministry teach us that God's desire for people is health and wholeness.

Chapter nine of the Gospel of Matthew gives us an idea of what the healing of Jesus looks like. First, Jesus forgives the sins and heals

the body of a paralytic. Then Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners and describes that act of community as a kind of healing, saying that "those who are well have no need of a physician." Next Jesus heals a woman of a hemorrhage, brings a young girl back from the brink of death, and heals two blind men. Then Jesus casts out a demon, healing the mind of a man who had been possessed and thus restoring him to speech.

At the end of this chapter in Matthew, Jesus asserts that the world's need for healing is vast, and he prays that his followers will be laborers in the harvest. Later, Jesus will entrust his ministry of healing and reconciliation to his disciples. Over the centuries, the church has taken this calling very seriously. As Christians, we strive to live this ministry of healing and reconciliation by offering prayers, forgiveness, and compassion to one another. Two sacramental rites in the Episcopal Church—reconciliation of a penitent and unction of the sick—serve as outward signs of our participation in and experience of God's reconciliation and healing.

Reconciliation of a Penitent

Embedded in the rites of the church is an awareness that we will never perfectly execute our desires—that is, we want to be good and kind, but we sometimes

fail. We desire to be good neighbors and compassionate people, but sometimes we miss the mark, letting jealousy, anger, or frustration govern our actions. In baptism and confirmation, we promise to persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord (304). In the marriage service, we pray for the couple that they might have "grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours" (429).

In both instances, we promise to repent and seek forgiveness not if, but when. Even in the midst of dedicating ourselves to God, we recognize that we are going to fail in the promises that we make. And when we inevitability fail or flounder, we vow to take action, to repent and return to the Lord. The Christian life is an unfolding and ongoing practice of seeking forgiveness, from one another and from God.

Reconciliation of a Penitent is the sacramental rite whereby we seek and receive that forgiveness. People often express surprise when they learn that the Episcopal Church has a service of confession, exclaiming: "I thought that was only for Catholics!" Others resist the idea of reconciliation by saying, "We say the confession in church every Sunday, so I'm covered; I don't have to do that."

Deeper Apologies, Deeper Forgiveness

When my daughters were younger, I often found myself saying: "Apologize to your sister!" This would elicit a mumbled and less-than-heartfelt apology. "Say it like you mean it!" I would instruct, and a half-sincere "I'm sorry" would follow. I lectured and cajoled, attempting to convince my children to actually *be* sorry, rather than just *saying* sorry. But it felt like an uphill battle.

Then, one day, a friend and her children were visiting. One child hurt the other's feelings, and my friend pulled her girls aside. She sat them down face-to-face and said, "You need to make a real apology to your sister." And lo and behold, the instigator apologized sincerely, promising to try to act differently in the future and asking how she could make it better. I was amazed.

I immediately asked my friend to teach me how to do that. And she taught me a "five-finger formula for real apologies." Instead of simply saying sorry when a wrong occurs, you stop, look the person in the face, and say:

> I am sorry for ...
>
> That was wrong because...

Next time I will...

What can I do to help? (or How can I make this right?)

Will you forgive me?

It's simple but brilliant. Instead of just mumbling "I'm sorry," a real apology includes naming clearly what you did, reflecting on why it was wrong, promising to change the behavior in the future, trying to make amends, and actively asking for forgiveness.

We now use the five-finger formula in our family, and it really works—not just for kids but for all ages! It's a way to take responsibility for our actions and bad choices, to reflect meaningfully on why those things are wrong, to seek ways to change our actions in the future, and to actively ask for and seek out forgiveness.

Reconciliation of a Penitent is the church's version of the "five-finger formula" for apologies. Sometimes our corporate confession of sin in the liturgy, or even our own personal prayers of confession, can become rote, like the mumbled "sorry" of a child who knows she or he is supposed to apologize but doesn't really mean it. And sometimes our confessions aren't rote, but they are rushed: We don't have (or take) time to really reflect on what we have done wrong, why it was wrong, and how to amend our lives going forward. The rite of reconciliation allows us to take the time to work through

our apologies with God in a thoughtful and deliberate manner.

Getting Ready for Reconciliation

In order to prepare for confession, you first need to find a confessor to offer the rite. This is normally either a priest or a bishop, because they are empowered by the church to offer absolution: that is, to declare on behalf of God that a person's sins are forgiven. But a lay person may hear confession and offer a declaration of forgiveness, provided in the rite, in lieu of absolution. Some people prefer to make their confession to a priest they don't know; in that case your priest would be glad to help you find someone to hear your confession. Other people are grateful to make confession in the context of ongoing relationship; they feel that the sacred conversation is more natural when they know and have experience with their confessor. Who you choose to hear your confession is a matter of personal preference.

There are some wonderful books that you can read to prepare further for confession. Hillary D. Raining's book, *Joy in Confession: Recovering Sacramental Reconciliation*, published by Forward Movement (2017)

and Martin Smith's book *Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church* (1985) are both excellent resources if you would like to learn more.

Your priest may have suggestions for how you can prepare for confession. Many people find it helpful to write out their confession before the service itself. This can give you the opportunity to reflect on what you want to bring to God as well as keep you from being overwhelmed by nervousness in the moment.

A Sacred Conversation

If you have never experienced the rite of reconciliation, you might worry about what it's like. Your only experience with confession may be what you have seen in the movies: a mysterious action that involves sitting in a booth with a priest hiding behind a screen.

But in the Episcopal Church, the rite of reconciliation doesn't usually take place in a confessional booth. Although a few Episcopal churches have and use confessional booths, the normal practice is for the penitent (the person desiring the sacrament of reconciliation) and the confessor (the priest or bishop hearing confession) to sit together, either in the church building or a chapel, or even in an

office. The two people might sit on either side of the altar rail, so that there is a place to kneel when appropriate, or they might even sit face to face in chairs. The point is that the rite is not simply scripted words but a sacred conversation.

The Book of Common Prayer provides two forms for reconciliation, following a similar formula, but with different wording and emphasis. Starting on page 447, both forms begin with an opening prayer followed by a prayer that includes space for the penitent to enumerate particular sins.

At the heart of both rites is the chance to name aloud the things for which you are seeking God's forgiveness. Saying these things out loud can be scary; we would rather avoid our sins than face them head-on. But there is also great power in shining the light of truth into the dark places of our lives. Shame feeds on silence and secrecy. When we enumerate our sins aloud and ask specifically for forgiveness, we can set down the weight of sin and shame that we've been carrying and allow God to take away those burdens.

Next the priest offers counsel, direction, and comfort; this is also incredibly important. Talking through some of the things that we have named can bring relief, and our confessor can help us think through problems and how we might face them. This is where it is helpful to think of the

rite as a sacred conversation. In the course of this conversation, the priest may offer a "psalm, prayer, or hymn to be said, or something to be done, as a sign of penitence and act of thanksgiving" (446). This is a way of acknowledging that the act of reconciliation involves more than just words; sometimes action for restoration is needed. Any action that is suggested is emphatically not punishment; it is a sign of penitence and an act of thanksgiving. These prayers or actions are the outward and visible sign of the inward work of forgiveness and reconciliation that is being done between us and God.

After we have named our sins, talked about them with our confessor, and engaged in or committed to any acts of penitence and thanksgiving, the priest offers absolution, the sure and certain assurance of God's forgiveness. The absolution from the rite of reconciliation is slightly different from the general absolution we receive in our Sunday worship. In this rite, the words of absolution are specific, focused on the particular acts or failures you have named aloud and directed to you, personally, rather than the gathered congregation. This can help us hear the assurance of forgiveness in a new and powerful way. After absolution, the rite ends with a dismissal, sending the forgiven penitent out into the world in peace.

The secrecy of reconciliation is not, hopefully, a license for abuse. The space in the rite when a priest offers "counsel, direction, and comfort" is a moment when, if a crime had been committed, the priest could encourage the penitent to report himself or herself and offer to go with the person to the authorities immediately. A priest would presumably withhold absolution until true repentance, including taking responsibility for one's actions, had been made.

The dismissal is the end of the matter. Confession has been made, God's forgiveness is offered, and the penitent can depart in peace. The content of a confession is "not normally a matter of subsequent discussion" (446). The person who hears your confession will not hold on to it. When God offers forgiveness, that forgiveness is complete, as though the slate has been wiped clean. And the "secrecy of confession is morally absolute." You don't have to worry about your confessor telling other people what you said during the reconciliation or even speaking to you about it again.

Unction

The rite of reconciliation is one of the ways that we can experience healing and

wholeness of the soul, feeling fully restored to right relationship with God. But Jesus was also frequently involved in physical healing of the body. Out of this central part of Jesus' ministry arose the practices of prayer, anointing, and laying on of hands. Even in the New Testament, we hear stories of early groups of Christians engaged in these practices:

> Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. (James 5:13-16)

Praying, anointing, and laying hands on the sick is a practice the church has engaged from the earliest times until this day. The sacramental rite in which we do this is called unction, meaning simply "to anoint;" anointing is the act of pouring or rubbing oil on a person.

Some people connect the practice of unction with extreme unction, otherwise known as "last rites." This type of prayer and anointing is done when a person is nearing death, and it is an important expression of the rite of unction. But, as is clear from the passage from James, anointing is not reserved exclusively for the deathbed; it is for any time of sickness. Thus *The Book of Common Prayer* contains two different rites that both contain elements of unction—one for all the sick and one especially for the time of death.

As a priest, I pray a lot; I sometimes joke that it's my job to pray. I'm always the one at family gatherings asked to offer the blessing, I lead the liturgies of the church on a regular basis, and I often have the joy of praying with and for people in all stages and circumstances of life. But my prayers are the most fervent and faithful in times of sickness: when someone I love is suffering or when I, myself, am in pain. When we find ourselves sitting in the doctor's office, getting a diagnosis, or holding the hand of a loved one in a hospital bed, our prayers take on a renewed urgency and importance. These times of sickness and struggle often draw our most desperate prayers.

Ministration to the Sick

We can, of course, offer prayers in our own words—our heartfelt cries to and conversations with God. But sometimes we cannot find the words to pray on our own, and we need the ancient prayers of a liturgy to give voice to our faith and fears. At other times, we desperately desire companions in our prayer—we want our priest to pray with and for us as well as the company of all the saints joining their prayers to ours. For times such as these and many more, the Episcopal Church offers unction, also known as Ministration to the Sick.

Found in *The Book of Common Prayer* on pages 453-457, Ministration to the Sick can be used both for visiting people in hospitals and homes and for regular administration at church in a formal service of healing. Anyone who wants the sacramental rite can call the church and the clergy would be glad to come, pray, anoint the person with oil, and offer communion. If you find yourself far from home, simply call a local Episcopal church; any priest would be honored to come and offer this sacramental rite.

Whether this rite takes place in a home, hospital, or church, Ministration to the Sick contains the same three parts: ministry of the word, laying on of hands and anointing, and Holy Communion.

The ministry of the word begins with readings and prayers, grounding the experience in biblical stories of anointing

and healing. After the confession and peace, the service continues with the laying on of hands and anointing. The priest lays hands upon the sick person while praying. Just as a priest touches the bread and wine during eucharist or the water at baptism, a priest touches the person receiving prayers during this sacrament. A priest may also use oil to anoint the sick person, making the sign of the cross. The oil serves as a physical sign of the spiritual grace. "As you are outwardly anointed with this holy oil, so may our heavenly Father grant you the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit" (456).

Oil for anointing is used in both the service of Holy Baptism and in Ministration to the Sick, but the oil used in the two rites is different. The anointing oil used at Holy Baptism is oil of chrismation and must be blessed by the bishop; the oil is then used at individual baptisms as a sign of connection to the wider church. The anointing oil used in Ministration to the Sick is oil of unction and can be blessed by either a priest or a bishop. Traditionally olive oil is used, sometimes mixed with certain scents or spices. The particular oil is not specified, only the prayers that are used to bless it.

After anointing, the service may continue with Holy Communion. If the rite takes place in a home or hospital, the service of communion may be omitted. When the anointing is used at church, it is usually

in the context of Holy Eucharist: Feasting together in Christ's Body and Blood is the ultimate sacrament of healing. In fact, *The Book of Common Prayer* notes that "When the Laying on of Hands or Anointing takes place at a public celebration of the Eucharist, it is desirable that it precede the distribution of Holy Communion and it is recommended that it take place immediately before the exchange of the Peace" (453). This sounds very particular, but there's a reason behind this instruction—it intimately links prayers of healing with forgiveness. This is a reminder that forgiveness of sins and reconciliation—the healing of the spirit and soul—are inextricably linked to physical health and healing. The service then continues with eucharist, a reminder of the healing and wholeness we experience every time we share in communion, of how we are brought into right relationship with God and with one another. By ending with communion, the service builds to a climax with Holy Eucharist being the final and most important moment.

The service of Ministration to the Sick includes the following notation: "If the sick person cannot receive either the consecrated Bread or the Wine, it is suitable to administer the Sacrament in one kind only...If a person desires to receive the Sacrament, but, by reason of extreme sickness or physical disability, is unable to eat and drink the Bread and Wine,

the Celebrant is to assure that person that all the benefits of Communion are received, even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth." (457) This is an important reminder, not only in times of sickness, but for anyone who is unable, for whatever reason, to eat and drink the Bread and Wine of communion.

Personal Prayers

Nestled between the formal rites for the sick and those who are dying is a small "library" of prayers for times of sickness (458-461). These pages include beautiful prayers available for all different circumstances: for an operation, for sleep, for doctors and nurses, and many others. These prayers are not limited to use in the liturgy—they are great for use in personal prayer. They are even appropriate to be saved and shared with loved ones, to be included in a mailed card, or to be left after a hospital visit.

Ministration at the Time of Death

It may seem strange to think of death as part of a healing rite, yet that is exactly what Christians believe—that death is a kind of healing. In death we are gathered to God and

restored to fullness in body, mind, and spirit, in that place where there is no sorrow or sighing, but only life everlasting. So it is that *The Book of Common Prayer* includes a liturgy at the time of death as part of its healing services. The focus of these prayers is not a last-ditch effort to save a person *from* death but a way to accompany a person *through* death. Healing in these prayers is seen not as a bodily deliverance from illness but as salvation and peace.

The service begins on page 462 with a reminder that the church should be present, with prayers and ministry, when someone dies. Every priest is grateful to pray with families, no matter where or when. This is what the church is for, and you can always call and ask for a priest's presence and prayers at any time of the night or day.

This sacramental rite begins with an opening prayer, then moves to a litany that is said with responses, the Lord's Prayer, and a concluding collect and commendation. The service ends with a commendatory prayer that will be said again in the burial service. All of these prayers connect life in this world with life in the world to come, a reminder that death is not an enemy to be fought but a force that has already been vanquished by Jesus Christ, who ushers us in to eternal life.

This rite exists as a service of healing for the community as well. As family and friends pray with and for the one who is dying, they

can hopefully also experience healing and receive some measure of the peace that only Christ can give.

Taken together, these sacramental rites of the church—Reconciliation of a Penitent and Ministration to the Sick as well as at the time of death—reflect the many circumstances and situations that might need healing. They also remind us that healing looks different for various people and in a variety of circumstances.

We are healed when we are forgiven of sin and brought back into relationship with God and one another. We are healed when we recover from sicknesses of body, mind, and spirit. And we are healed when, in our final days, we enter into life everlasting with Jesus Christ. Our healing is a lifelong journey, as we seek again and again the sacraments of reconciliation and unction, asking God to be present and bless us, even in the midst of sin and sickness, and to ultimately bring us to wholeness and health.

For Reflection

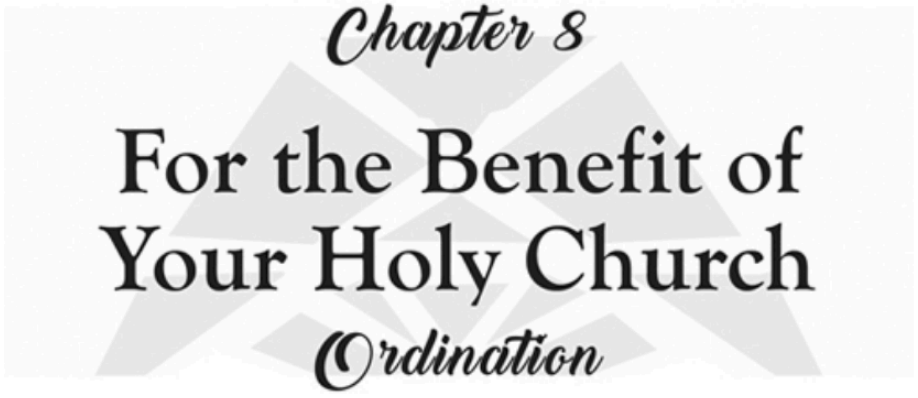
- Confession is perhaps the least understood and practiced sacrament in the Episcopal Church. What are some of the reasons that people might be resistant to it? What are some of the benefits that a person who receives the sacrament might experience?

- Have you ever given or received a sincere apology that led to the repair of a relationship? What was that like? How might that same experience impact our relationship with God?

- *The Book of Common Prayer* and the scriptures make a connection between healing of soul and healing of the body. How might acts of confession or reconciliation heal us, as individuals and as communities?

- Healing doesn't always look like full, perfect restoration to bodily health. What are some of the other forms that healing can take?

- Our prayer book provides prayers for the time of death. How might offering these prayers benefit the dying person or gathered family members?



the benefit of your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 256

Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, in your divine providence you have appointed various orders in your Church: Give your grace, we humbly pray, to all who are called to any office and ministry for your people; and so fill them with the truth of your doctrine and clothe them with holiness of life, that they may faithfully serve before you, to the glory of your great Name and for

Who is the most important person in the church? If you attend church on a regular basis, you might think that the most important person is the priest: She does most of the talking, leading the prayers and preaching the sermon. Perhaps you think the deacon has the prime position, because when the deacon reads the gospel, we all turn and face him. Or you might think the most important person is the bishop:

She wears the fanciest clothes, sits in the most elaborate chair, and has authority over the priests. Or maybe you think the most important people are the members of the church; after all they are the most numerous people by far, and they are the ones who carry out much of the church's ministry and help keep the doors open with their pledges and contributions.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the church as a body with many members, each member having an important, integral part in the whole:

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,"

> that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 12-21, 27)

The metaphor that Paul uses here is a powerful one. When we choose to follow Jesus, we become a part of something bigger than ourselves: the Body of Christ. And as we explore Paul's metaphor of the body, we learn a few things about the church. The church has a unity; it is "one body." But it also has diversity; there are "many members." In this body, we each have a unique place and an essential role; we need each other. The church is diminished by the absence of any one member; we cannot say to one another, "I have no need of you." And a single member cannot function without the body; no one person can say "because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body." There is no single, most important member of the Body of Christ; we are all necessary. Each person has unique gifts, skills, and talents that God has given us, and these gifts are to be used "for

the common good." In order for the Body of Christ—the church—to work properly, each person must find his or her role in the body, an important part of the larger whole.

From the very beginning, followers of Jesus tried to find their place in the community. Jesus' disciples argued about who would be the greatest and who would sit at Jesus' right hand (Mark 10:35-45). Jesus told them then what Paul would say later: It is not about being the greatest or most powerful but about serving one another and working together for the common good.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the church began to form, and it became evident that some system of organization was needed.

> Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said

> pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)

The apostles laid hands on certain people and prayed for them, in order to set them aside for a particular ministry. This was not about a hierarchy of importance or holiness but about a differentiation of responsibility. Early gatherings of Christians sought out people with the gifts and skills to serve in certain positions—so that all the different aspects of ministry would receive the attention and care they needed.

The idea of ordination—praying for and laying hands on certain people to set them aside for ministry as deacons, priests, and bishops—comes from these early roots. Ordination is not about instilling a hierarchy or limiting the power of ministry to certain people. As the Catechism tells us quite clearly: "Q. Who are the ministers of the Church? A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons" (855). All Christians—lay people, bishops, priests, and deacons—are ministers of the church. Notice how the clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons—are listed in a particular rank, from highest to lowest. And note the position of lay people: first.

This is because our church teaching places lay people as the most important ministers in the church. Ordination, then, is about putting everyone in an ordered life. Part of that ordering is giving different roles and responsibilities and, yes, authority, to different members of the body, so that hands can be hands and feet can be feet and eyes can be eyes, and the entire body is enriched.

Orders of the Church

From the time of the New Testament, there have been specific, different ministries within the church; scripture passages such as Acts 15:2-23, 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and 5:17-22, and Titus 1:5-9 give an early sense of what these ministries looked like.

By the second or third century, these various descriptions had developed into three distinct orders (or types) of ordained ministry in the church: bishops, priests (or presbyters), and deacons.

- **Bishops:** The English word for bishop comes from the Greek *episcopos*, which literally means overseer. Thus the bishop's ministry is one of oversight: leading, supervising, and uniting the church. Bishops in the Episcopal Church are part of the historic episcopate, which means that they can trace their ordinations, through apostolic succession, back to the earliest apostles.

- **Priests (Presbyters):** In the New Testament, presbyter comes from the Greek word *presbyteros*, meaning elder, and indicates a leader of the church. In its earliest usage, presbyter was sometimes used interchangeably with the word for bishop, but as the church began to grow and spread, bishops and presbyters evolved into distinct roles. By the third century, bishops were those with overarching authority, while presbyters were responsible for the teaching and preaching, administration, and sacramental ministry in a particular congregation or area, under the oversight of the bishop. The English word priest is derived from the word for presbyter, and the two terms can be used interchangeably.

- **Deacons:** Deacon comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning servant, and the ministry of deacon is clearly described in the New Testament. Acts 6:1-7 details the selection of the first deacons, and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 describes the qualifications and traits of deacons. These passages, taken together with the tradition of the early church, have shaped our understanding of deacons as people who are especially set aside for a ministry of service, both in their

role in the liturgy and in their work on behalf of the poor and oppressed.

Orders of Ministry

The Episcopal Church recognizes three distinct orders of ordained ministry within the church: bishops, priests, and deacons. Each order of ministry has a unique role in the church. Bishops are tasked with the responsibility to "guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church" (517). They also "carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church" (510). The bishops' roles as leaders and guardians are held in tension: They are called to guard the historic faith and are sometimes cautious with respect to change and innovation, especially when the change at hand might be divisive. Yet as leaders, bishops also are called to boldly proclaim the gospel, challenging and stirring up the conscience of their people. As guardians and leaders, bishops are also called to live as servants, following the example of Jesus who came, not to be served, but to serve.

Priests are called "to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ...to love and serve the people among whom [they] work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor... to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in

the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to [them]" (531). These roles are clearly sacramental, rooted in the experience of worship, though certainly not limited to the realm of liturgy. The role of the priest is rooted in community; priests work *among* the people of a particular church. Yet the role of priests is not passive; they are entrusted with the call and the power to proclaim the gospel, preach, declare forgiveness, pronounce blessing, and perform other expressions of ministry.

Both bishops and priests are called to be servants, as the ordination services tell us again and again. Yet deacons are called to a special ministry of servanthood within the church: "interpret[ing] to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world... At all times, [their] life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself" (543). The focus of deacons is ministering to the needs of those who are most often forgotten —by the world and by the church—and relentlessly reminding all Christians of their baptismal vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons.

The church laws, known as the canons, include specific instructions about how people are chosen, trained, and equipped to serve as bishops, priests, and deacons. The process for seeking ordination is clearly laid

out in these guidelines, but our prayers for ordination reveal most clearly what we hope bishops, priests, and deacons will do, and who we hope they will be in the context of our common life. The last of the sacramental rites in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ordination is "the rite in which God gives authority and the grace of the Holy Spirit to those being made bishops, priests, and deacons, through prayer and the laying on of hands by bishops" (860-861).

Ordination Rites

All three services of ordination follow a similar structure, though each contains unique prayers and features suited to their particular ministry (the services begin on page 509 in *The Book of Common Prayer*). After beginning with the opening acclamation and collect for purity, each ordination service includes:

- **The presentation:** This is when members of the church, including both priests and lay people, present the ordinand (the person being ordained) to the bishop and certify that she has fulfilled the requirements of the canons in order to be ordained. The ordinand is then required to sign the following declaration: "I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain

all things necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church."

- **The litany for ordinations:** Prayer for one another is one of the most important things we do as Christians. The litany for ordinations, which may be said or sung, includes a few prayers for the ordinand but is largely focused on praying for the whole church and for the world (548-551).

- **The liturgy of the word:** Each service includes suggestions for appropriate readings of scripture, which are followed by the sermon and the Nicene Creed.

- **The examination:** The bishop begins the examination with an address that articulates the unique character of each order of ministry. Then the ordinand is asked a series of questions that echo the baptismal promises but also are specific to how those promises are lived out in ordained ministry.

- **The consecration:** The ordinand kneels before the bishop while those gathered sing a hymn invoking the Holy Spirit. The bishop says a prayer of consecration, then lays hands upon the head of the ordinand. After a final prayer and the people's loud "Amen," the ordinand is vested according to his order—that is, bishops receive the accoutrements of the office, such as a

bishop's hat, called a mitre, and a pastoral staff, called a crozier, which reminds the bishop that she or he is a shepherd to a spiritual flock. Priests and deacons receive stoles. Deacons traditionally wear the stole diagonally across their bodies, while priests wear the stole around their neck with the sides hanging in front. The newly ordained receive a Bible as well.

- **The peace and celebration of Holy Eucharist:** The service continues with the eucharist. The newly ordained person(s) takes part in the liturgy as befits the order (administering the bread or wine, saying the blessing, dismissing the people).

The beautiful prayers of the ordination services have a lot to teach us and articulate a vision for the church and those ordained to serve it. As we read through the services and reflect on the prayers and promises, we find:

- Each ordination service articulates a distinct view of ministry, but they are also all interdependent. Deacons are reminded that they assist bishops and priests, priests are instructed to "labor together" with the laity and fellow ministers, and bishops are called to "encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries." The ordination services remind us that all of us together are the Body of Christ and that we rely on one another to faithfully live out Christ's call in the world.

- One of the most frequently repeated words in the services of ordination is "servant." The Episcopal Church is clear that those who are ordained—as bishops, priests, or deacons—are set apart in order to serve the church, not rule over it. They are called to be leaders, but not lords. This is a delicate, and often difficult, balance.

- In ordination, we endow our leaders —bishops, priests, and deacons— with authority. That authority is not to be taken lightly, as it is a sacred trust and responsibility. In turn, those being ordained take vows of loyalty and obedience (things we don't much like to talk about in today's world) and make specific promises about how they will live their lives and exercise their ministry. There is mutual obligation here: Ordinands commit themselves to the community, and the community places itself under the authority of those being ordained.

- The entire Body of Christ has an integral role in the ordination services. Those who are being ordained are selected and presented for ordination by representatives of the community. In an echo of the baptism and marriage services, all of those present at the ordination service commit to uphold the person being ordained in her ministry. And at the end of the Prayer of Consecration, the prayer book directs

> "The People in a loud voice respond **Amen.**" This is the only place in *The Book of Common Prayer* where it describes the volume we should use in making a response, an indication that the role of the community is particularly important here. In ordination, we, the church, ask God to empower the person being ordained with authority. We commit to uphold these persons in their ministry. And we consent, with our loud Amen, to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the ordinand.

Despite some of the differences in the ordination service for bishop, priest, and deacon, the rite points us to the foundation of the Episcopal Church, the idea that life and liturgy are intimately linked. In ordination, we call bishops, priests, and deacons not only to functions with the church's services but also to a way of life that reflects who they are ordained to be. This is true, in fact, of all of our liturgy and life: as it is in our worship, so it is in the world. The roles that each order of ministry plays in our worship reflects their roles in the world.

In the liturgy, deacons serve at the table of eucharist, guide the people in prayer, and dismiss the people into the world, because deacons are servants who pray and send people out to seek and serve Christ. In the liturgy, priests celebrate the sacraments, pronounce blessing, and declare forgiveness, because priests are sacramental people who

communicate God's blessing and forgiveness in the world. In the liturgy, bishops ordain, confirm, and lead when they are present because bishops are people of leadership and unity, drawing distinct congregations together into the greater body of the Episcopal Church. And in the liturgy, lay people read the lessons, administer the chalice, and carry the cross and torches because laity are called to communicate Jesus Christ, in word and deed, in ways big and small, in their daily lives in the world.

Our ordination liturgies proclaim what Paul tells us in Corinthians and what Acts tells us about the beginning of the church: We are one body, with many members. Each member of the church has an important, integral role to play. And we can and must allow all people—laity, bishops, priests, and deacons—to exercise their particular gifts in the service of both the church and the world.

For Reflection

- According to the prayer book, "The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons." What are the roles and responsibilities of each, in the church and in the world?

- How do you see each order of ministry exercised in liturgy?

- Look at the vows for the ordination of a priest on pages 531-532 of *The Book of Common Prayer.* What do you notice about the scope of these vows? Are any of the vows surprising?

- Think about the last bishop's visitation at your church. What are some of the ways that you could see the bishop's ministry exercised, in liturgy or otherwise?